The Pope Says He's Sorry TRB BY LEON WIESELTIER

THE NEW REPUBLIC

America Needs Elites
JOHN B. JUDIS

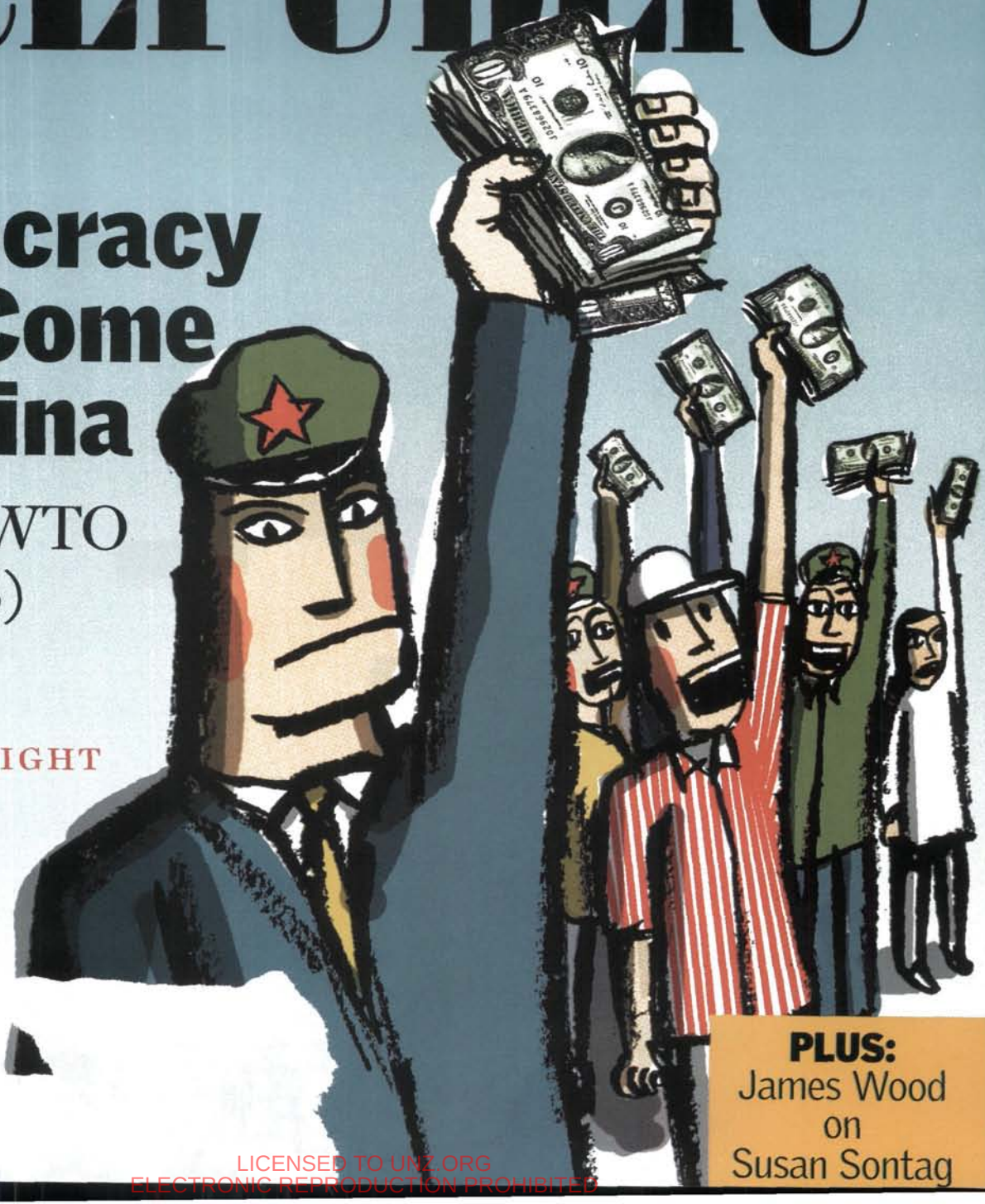
W. Needs Gore's Book
FRANKLIN FOER

MARCH 27, 2000

Why Democracy Will Come to China

(And the WTO Will Help)

By
ROBERT WRIGHT



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THE NEW REPUBLIC
A Journal of Politics and the Arts

WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 27, 2000
ISSUE 4,445

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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 222, Number 13, Issue 4,445, March 27, 2000. (Printed in the United States on March 15, 2000.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated January 3, April 17 & 24, July 10 & 17, and August 28 & September 4, 2000) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. For advertising inquiries, please contact Ann Rossaki at (202) 331-7494 or Shannel Myers in our New York sales office at (212) 924-8700. Yearly subscriptions, $59.94; foreign, $99.94 (U.S. funds); Canada, $79.94 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $4.00 (includes postage & handling). © 2000 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 331-0275. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, CD-ROM, issue, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone 1-800-521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 37298, Boone, IA 50037-0298. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. E-mail address: tnr@aol.com. For subscription inquiries or problems call 1-800-827-1289 or visit our website at www.tnr.com.

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More discrimination

TO THE EDITORS:

One might hope for more discrimination on the part of THE NEW REPUBLIC's editors. Your editorial on Jörg Haider states that "*The Wall Street Journal* appears to believe that Haider is more an enemy of dirigisme than an enemy of decency, that he represents only a cynical version of the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute" ("Haider and the Hypocrites," February 21). The *Wall Street Journal* column ("The EU, Not Haider, Threatens Austrian Democracy," February 4) on which this speculation is presumably based, however, only associates much of Haider's economic program with the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, without any implication that *The Wall Street Journal*, Heritage, or Cato endorses the nativism that you, and we, find so offensive.

As you should know, Cato scholars have consistently supported expanded immigration into the United States and have consistently and vigorously opposed authoritarianism of any color—whether black, red, or green.

WILLIAM A. NISKANEN
Chairman
The Cato Institute
Washington, D.C.

Cross purpose

TO THE EDITORS:

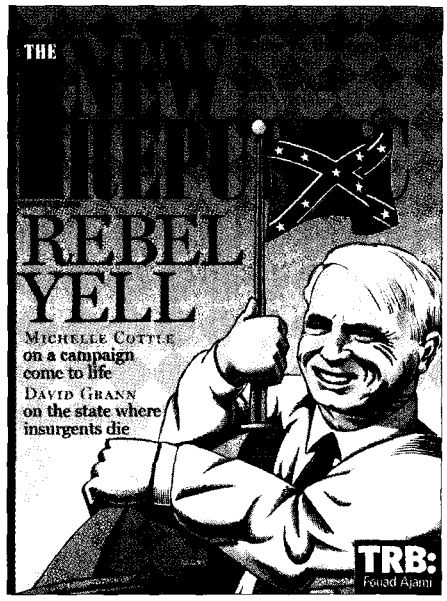
James Wood's observations on the hypocrisy of George W. Bush's profession of faith in Jesus Christ are quite accurate ("Playing God," February 21). However, they beg the question. It is a bit much to criticize a politician who uses religion to attain power. Bush may be faulted for the lack of political skill in his inept use of the Gospels. But to attack him because he fails to respond to the "true Christian challenge" of "revolutionary love" and of being "perfect, as my Father in heaven" seems to disregard the elementary principles of political technique. In any case, no one could possibly remain true to the example of Jesus Christ and live in the everyday world, let alone survive in the political arena. As Nietzsche put it, "There is only one Christian, and he died on the cross."

BENEDETTO FONTANA
Professor of Political Science
Baruch College
New York, New York

Deductive logic

TO THE EDITORS:

In the February 21 Notebook, TNR again



opposes making health insurance completely tax-deductible for those who pay for it themselves. Why is this a bad idea?

Having an employer buy one's health insurance is equivalent to receiving the amount of the premium as extra pay, using this extra pay to buy insurance, and then deducting the cost from one's income when calculating taxes. Thus, the deduction TNR opposes is effectively given to workers with employer-paid insurance. I cannot imagine a reason why it ought to be granted to these workers and not to others when the only difference between the two groups is the mechanism with which the insurance premiums are paid.

You argue that under the proposed legislation employers will not provide insurance because they will be able to buy it for themselves and receive more favorable tax treatment. The claim is that under current law a firm's deduction for insurance is so valuable to the employer that it is worthwhile for him to provide health insurance for workers just to take advantage of it. According to TNR's strange calculations, a business owner with, say, three employees finds it cheaper to buy insurance for four people, since insurance is deductible, than to buy it just for himself without a full deduction. Simple arithmetic shows that this is not so.

You further claim that employers can simply reduce their workers' pay by eliminating insurance, with no adverse consequences. You thus seem to believe that salaries depend solely on employers' generosity and are unrelated to such matters as worker productivity or conditions in the labor market. This notion is not an accurate description of how worker compensation is determined. A more sensible view would suggest that your fears are not well-grounded.

BERNARD YOMTOV
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Insecurity policy

TO THE EDITORS:

TNR seems to have forgotten the real concern that led the Nixon administration and the Brezhnev regime to agree to ban nationwide anti-missile systems in 1972 ("Sky's the Limit," February 7). The "cold war fear" was never that a deployed anti-ballistic missile system could "allow one country to survive a surprise first strike against the other." Instead, such a system would have given a country the capability to launch such a first strike itself and then defend against any retaliatory strike undertaken with the remnants. The deployment of a national missile defense (NMD) today would have precisely the same effect. With an NMD in place, the United States would possess the capability to transform any advanced nation on earth into a "small-scale threat." Potential American adversaries would consequently feel irresistible pressure to enhance their own offensive nuclear capabilities in order to retain a credible threat of retaliation and preserve the logic of deterrence through "mutually assured destruction."

Indeed, this was precisely the point made in January by Sha Zukang, China's top disarmament official. "Once you have got the missile shield," the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Sha as saying, "others will develop a spear strong enough to penetrate it.... Using Mao's words, it's a paper tiger—fierce enough to frighten away cowards only."

If there's any lesson to be derived from the twentieth century, it is that you cannot make yourself more secure by making your neighbors feel less secure. President Clinton could leave no greater legacy than to renounce the mutual insecurity that lies down the road of missile defense and then to commence formal negotiations on a universal, verifiable, and enforceable nuclear-weapon-elimination convention. That's the way to prevent atomic annihilation in the twenty-first century. That's humanity's best hope for putting the nuclear genie back in its bottle forever.

ALAN CRANSTON
Former United States Senator
President

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Vice President
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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Sorry

"WE ASK FOR forgiveness for the divisions that came between Christians, for the use of violence that some used in the service of truth, and for the attitudes of diffidence and hostility assumed before the followers of other religions," Pope John Paul II said last week in an extraordinary homily in St. Peter's. I have no doubt about the significance of this apology, and I have no doubt about the insignificance of this apology.

It is certainly characterized by a seriousness of mind and a largeness of soul. It is an apology that is not apologetic. It will disquiet not the critics of the Church but the Church itself, and rattle the believers (the honest believers) with the record of turpitude to which it admits. After all, the "sins" to which John Paul referred were some of the most monstrous crimes ever committed in the West. And still the pope insists upon a moral reckoning with those crimes, based upon an accurate knowledge of the past. The historiographical spirit is not usually a friend of the mysterium; but here is the pope teaching Catholics—in "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past," the document that was released by the Vatican to provide the theological foundations for this great repentance—"to avoid every form of mythical memory and reach a fair critical memory." They are also stringently reminded that historicism is not available to them as a refuge from the reckoning, because moral absolutists cannot have it both ways. If moral values are timeless, then what is wrong now was wrong then, and they cannot "make history justify anything."

The Vatican's document is a pastiche of ancient and modern prooftexts, to which a turgid account of Gadamer's hermeneutics has been added. (The pope's affection for modern philosophy is legendary, but it cannot be helpful to the parishes to instruct them that "the encounter with the past" can be "rich in a 'performative' efficaciousness.") The basis of John Paul's harrowing of the Catholic conscience, it explains, is "the purification of memory." I must confess that I do not quite understand the concept. The purification of memory seems less urgent than the purification by memory. Memory has not been the problem. The neglect of memory has been the problem.

"Purifying the memory," the document expounds, "means eliminating from personal or collective conscience all forms of resentment or violence left by the inheritance of the past, on the basis of a new and rigorous historical-theological judgment, which becomes the foundation for a renewed moral way of acting." This seems to suggest that the exercise is essentially therapeutic; that the past is not to be recovered so much as disarmed. But surely violence must be justified or not justified on moral grounds, regardless of history. And whose resentment, exactly, is to be dispelled? If it is the resentment of the Church's victims and their descendants, well, this resentment has a basis in reality, and they must banish it themselves from their own hearts. And if it is the resentment of the Church, well, what is it that the Church resents? It is, by its own admission, guilty.

But a bad conscience is a roiling thing. Thus a prominent theologian at the Vatican explained to a reporter that "we ask for forgiveness, and we forgive." They forgive whom, and for what? Their victims are not in need of their forgiveness. Or have the Jews finally been pardoned for the Inquisition? I am reminded of Robert Lowell's mischief with the Lord's Prayer:

> Father, forgive me
> my injuries,
> as I forgive
> those I
> have injured!

The document takes pains to show that it makes sense to offer an apology for an evil that was perpetrated a long time ago. It appeals to the existence of collective memory, or what it calls "intergenerational solidarity." Since the Church insists upon its spiritual and historical continuity, it must be morally continuous, too; and the document speaks even of the "objective common responsibility" of the Church. And this continuity obtains also for the victims, whose descendants (in the words of the same prominent theologian) "deserve our request for forgiveness."

Yet there is a difficulty here. I do not feel that it is right, I do not even know what it means, to accept an apology on my ancestors' behalf. In its liturgy and its ritual and its literature, my tradition makes the past into the present, and enjoins every individual in every generation "to see himself as if he, too, left Egypt." Tradition is an abolition of time and space: I remember the night, many years ago, when I studied Solomon bar Shimshon's chronicle of the doom of the Jews in the First Crusade, and I forgot that I was supposed to be a historian, and I wept. But the vividness of the victims to me does not mean that I may speak for them. I cannot absolve the Church for what was done to Master Isaac and Rabbi Kalonymos in Mainz. I am the son of my fathers, but I do not have the power to pardon. I was not tortured and I was not murdered. In this respect, there is no "as if." Collective memory does not release the past from its finality. There is "intergenerational solidarity," but there is also the incommensurability of every human life.

And so I cannot respond to the pope's ethical exquisiteness with anything more than sorrow. Of course, there is another way for the Vatican to honor the principle of "intergenerational solidarity": it could open its archives on the Holocaust years, and it could revise its grudging, theology-tainted policy toward Israel, whose citizens are among the descendants to whom this apology has been offered. Until the penitent in St. Peter's takes these steps, he is what Jewish law calls *tovel v'sheretz b'yado*, one who immerses himself in purifying waters while he holds in his hand an insect that makes him impure.

The Vatican's document includes among its classification of the Church's perfidies "the use of force in the service of truth." And in his prayer at his mass of contrition the pope declared that "Christians have often denied the Gospel, yielding to a mentality of power." Those are powerful words. They are also imprecise words. It was not a mentality of power to which Christians yielded. It was a structure of power. The outrages to which the pope refers were the direct consequence of the Church's holy alliance with the state; and it is worth recalling that it was modern politics, liberal politics, secular politics, and not anything that the Church said or did, that dissolved this unholy association of religion and power.

It is heartening to read, in the Vatican's document, John Paul's endorsement of the declaration by the Second Vatican Council that "the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth," except that the proposition turns on its makers. The autonomy of the truth cannot be established by authority. If Catholics now believe in the autonomy of the truth because the pope has so instructed them, then it is not the autonomy of the truth in which they really believe. Anyway, we have already been taught this lesson by Milton and Jefferson and Mill. The pope is right, but he is late. Again.

LEON WIESELTIER

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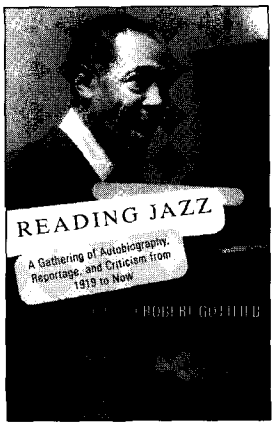

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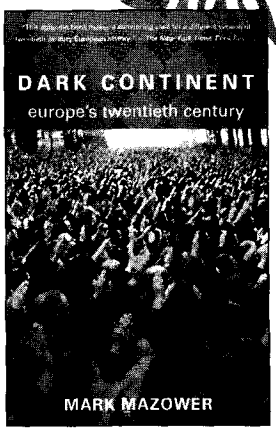

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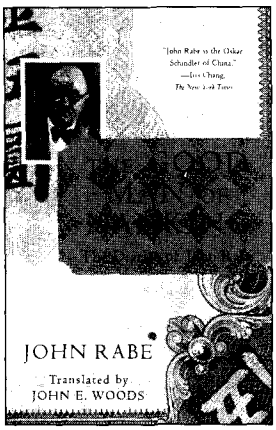

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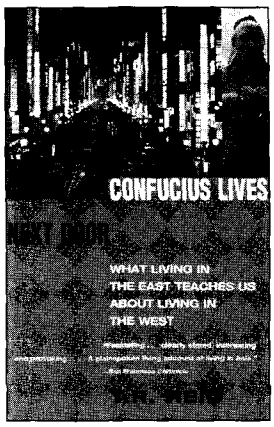

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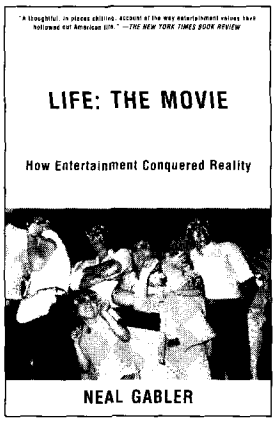

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

True Merit Pay

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

The coming teacher shortage is bringing renewed attention to the importance of excellent teaching. Some good ideas for attracting and keeping high-quality teachers have been floated, including the commonsense notion of paying teachers competitive salaries. But this being a political season, the idea of merit pay has also come up again. Although merit pay sounds plausible, it has been tried in many school districts over the years, and it has always failed, largely because traditional merit pay plans lack objective criteria.

That doesn't mean, of course, that great teaching shouldn't be rewarded financially or that rewards can't be handed out in a fair and rational way. Some districts are working to establish merit pay that really recognizes merit—with the involvement and support of teachers—through programs that identify master teachers or lead teachers and pay them significant salary differentials to work with their colleagues in a variety of ways.

Board-Certified Teachers

But there is a way for individual teachers from any school in the country to gain recognition of their excellence: board certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. NBPTS is an independent, nonprofit group that enjoys bipartisan support from Congress. It sets standards for excellence in teaching and is comparable to the boards that certify doctors in their areas of specialization.

Board certification is not to be confused with the state requirements teachers must satisfy before they are licensed to teach. It is a voluntary process for experienced teachers, and success is based on meeting high and objective criteria for classroom performance. The certification process consists of creating a professional portfolio—which includes lesson plans, student work, and classroom videos—performing a series of exercises designed to probe teaching skills, and passing a subject-matter exam. Any teacher who gets through all this with flying colors has met an extraordinarily high standard of professional excellence. Even those who do not pass the first time often say the certification process itself has made them better teachers.

The program gives schools and school districts an objective standard for identifying outstanding teachers who can serve as important resources in many different ways—including mentoring new teachers and helping other colleagues who need to sharpen their teaching skills. It also provides a sound basis for rewarding teachers for their merit.

National Board certification is a clear standard of teaching excellence.

Board certification is still relatively new—the first certificates were awarded in 1995. But the idea is beginning to catch on. NBPTS now offers certification in fields covering more than 80 percent of teachers. In November 1999, nearly 3,000 teachers received board certification, and 10,000 more have submitted their applications for the next round.

Many states and districts recognize that when teachers demonstrate this kind of merit, additional pay and other incentives are called for. Teacher unions agree, and a number of AFT locals have bargained contracts that include extra pay for board-certified teachers.

Incentives for Excellence

In California, teachers who successfully complete the certification process get a $10,000 bonus, and the governor has proposed that, if board-certified teachers agree to work in underperforming schools, they will get an additional $20,000. North Carolina pays the entire $2,000 application fee for teachers who complete the National Board process, and it gives a 12 percent increase in the state's portion of salaries paid to teachers who win board certification. With incentives like these, it's no wonder that 25 percent of teachers who now hold board certification are from North Carolina. All states and school districts should provide this kind of support.

Board certification is one of a number of paths we need to pursue in order to guarantee that every student has access to high-quality teaching. It is not a substitute for reforming teacher education—or for the across-the-board raises that would help make teaching more competitive with other professions. But it is a way to recognize a high level of competence and thus keep good teachers in the profession and in the classroom. It is a basis for merit pay that truly recognizes merit. And if the National Board meets the goal of 105,000 board-certified teachers in our schools by 2006, we will have a cadre of exemplary educators that can help us transform teaching and learning in our schools. ▮

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Stay and Fight

YOU CAN SEE why a third-party candidacy might look awfully good to John McCain right about now. In the last few months he has made himself into just about the most popular politician in the country. Yet he was denied his party's nomination in a process that—aside from its notable ugliness—appeared to demonstrate that any candidate moderate enough to appeal to a cross-partisan majority is ideologically unacceptable to the GOP's establishment and base voters. McCain's defeat would seem to confirm, in other words, that the senator's personal interests and the interests of political reform lie in direct opposition to the two-party system.

It is a tempting interpretation, and it is beginning to be heard from both McCain's allies and the remnants of the Reform Party. But the third-party impulse is a political and historical delusion. The best way for McCain to advance the cause he has championed is from within the Republican Party.

McCain's most significant reform of the American political system is not his campaign finance proposal—which, as even he acknowledges, would only ameliorate the corrupting power of money for as long as it took for the inevitable loopholes to be discovered. It is, rather, his crusade to reform the GOP. McCain has begun a long-overdue debate about what it means to be a conservative in the post-Reagan era. It may be too much to expect that the Republican Party will ever become the voice of the economically and socially powerless. But, given McCain's success, it is no longer impossible to imagine the party reconstituting itself around the principles of moralism (defined patriotically, not religiously) and reform. There is such a thing as enlightened corporate stewardship. It is wholly distinct from the robber-baron capitalism peddled by the likes of Bill Archer and Tom DeLay, and a growing minority of Republican voters know that.

McCain may not win this debate if he stays, but he cannot win it if he leaves. His ideological foes say his ideas are dangerous because they are foreign; to be a true conservative and a true Republican, as George W. Bush defined it during the primaries, is to subscribe to conservatism and Republicanism as they exist today. If McCain leaves the party, he proves Bush right. There is also a nascent coterie of McCain Republicans who have begun to rethink the meaning of conservatism. A McCain defection would subvert them, too.

McCain would also find himself up against the brute logic of the two-party system. Since American democracy does not allow for proportional representation, a vote for a third-party candidate is almost always wasted. It is possible, of course, for a third party to supplant an existing one. But the Reform Party, in its pitiable state, faced with a contented electorate and an absence of galvanizing crises, has no chance of doing away with the GOP. What's more, the corrupt and authoritarian party of Ross Perot has long since squandered its claim to being a legitimate vehicle for political reform.

Proponents of third parties, of course, claim that the two-party system inevitably produces the apathy and corruption against which McCain crusades. But the United States has always had a two-party system, and it has not always had an apathetic electorate. Since the Civil War, moreover, all of America's great political movements—from Progressivism to the New Right—have arisen within the two major parties. McCain's crusade to redefine the GOP is still in an embryonic stage. It is far too early to call it a lost cause.

Indeed, McCain's prospects within the GOP are bright. By strategically withholding his endorsement, he can force Bush to adopt some of his ideas. (Bush has already co-opted his slogans.) McCain's proven popularity will enhance his stature and influence within the Senate. What pork-barreling senator will not now fear a tongue-lashing from the man thought to embody the great political center?

Most importantly, McCain stands a real chance of capturing the Republican nomination in four years. It is true that the GOP elite rejected his apostasy this year. But a party's willingness to tolerate heresy is a direct function of the amount of time it has spent out of power. The Republican exile from the White House has lasted only two terms. Under comparable circumstances—eight years into the last GOP presidential dynasty—the Democrats nominated the technocratic but essentially liberal Michael Dukakis. Only four years later were they willing to nominate a New Democrat who truly jettisoned the party's political baggage. If Bush loses—particularly if he loses because he is portrayed as an out-of-step right-winger—Republicans will be ravenous for victory, and in McCain they will have their best and perhaps only chance to win. It's a chance worth waiting for. ■

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NOTEBOOK

OUT OF GAS: If you still don't believe the anti-tax movement has collapsed, just look at the political reaction to high gasoline prices. Four years ago, Bob Dole promised to repeal the "Clinton gas tax"—a miniscule levy included in the 1993 deficit-reduction plan—while the White House quivered helplessly, refusing to defend its own policy. This year, once again, the Republican presidential candidate (this time, George W. Bush) is promising to repeal the "Gore tax," as it is now called. But this time around the Democrats are holding firm, and even Republicans aren't jumping on board. "Let's not get bogged down on only one dimension of the problem that is in itself a short-term dimension that offers scant relief," warned Dick Armey. "I don't know if it has any effect on fuel costs," echoed J.C. Watts. "Supply and demand is driving price right now." Armey and Watts, we are pleased (and surprised) to report, have it right. In a market of fixed supply, a cut in the sales tax will enrich sellers, not buyers. Of course, the outbreak of sanity was only temporary, as Watts and Armey "clarified" their remarks the next day—insisting that they do, in fact, toe the Bush campaign's line. Oh well. Remember how Bush's cool-headed pragmatism was supposed to moderate the mindless anti-government cant of the congressional Republicans? Who'd have thought it would end up being the other way around?

Priest's healing hands credited with miracles

—*The San Francisco Examiner*, Elizabeth Fernandez, February 20

Priest admits touching boys

—same newspaper, same writer, same day

(THANKS TO M.H. JAMESON OF PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA)

HIS SHIP COMES IN: In early February, when the House passed a bill to increase military ties with Taiwan, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott was a voice of reason, counseling his Senate peers to consider the delicacy of China-U.S. relations before endorsing it. "We should proceed with due diligence," Lott cautioned at the time. A few weeks later, the Mississippi Republican was still a model of equanimity, advising all parties to "keep calm with regard to their demeanors" when hammering out China's trade status. But, more recently, Lott himself seems to have gotten swept up in the militaristic fervor over China and Taiwan. On March 1, Lott, along with two other Republican senators, sent a letter to President Clinton suggesting that Congress's approval of permanent normal trade relations with China might depend on the administration's "prompt" approval of weapons sales to Taiwan. These high-tech goodies would include four radar-equipped naval destroyers that the beleaguered isle requested from the State Department last November. China has warned that such a transaction would irreparably damage Sino-U.S. relations, and some military analysts speculate the Chinese would destroy the destroyers before they become operational. In the letter, Lott claimed that his support for the weapons sales was prompted by China's infamous white paper threatening "drastic measures" against Taiwan if the island does not reunify with the mainland. No doubt Lott's attention is firmly fixed on East Asia, but could it have escaped him that one of the only two shipyards equipped to build the destroyers is in Pascagoula, Mississippi? Probably not, considering that Lott can actually see the shipyard from the front porch of his Mississippi home, his father once worked there, and in 1997 he professed, "I'll do anything for that shipyard." What's more, lobbyists from the shipyard have recently been in contact with Lott's office about the sales, according to *National Journal*. Then again, maybe the senator took the opportunity to lecture them on the importance of a calm demeanor when dealing with foreign policy.

ROLL BACK: When State Department spokesman James Rubin toured Kosovo hot spots last week, he reassured his Balkan hosts, "We're in this for the long term." Too bad no one told Congress. On March 9, Virginia Republican John Warner, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, took to the Senate floor and argued that American participation in the U.N. peacekeeping force in Kosovo should be short-term. Warner proposed embargoing half of the $2 billion currently appropriated for Kosovo peacekeeping work until European nations increase their financial and personnel contributions to the U.N. operation. And if they don't? Then the remaining $1 billion, Warner explained, "may be used only for the purpose of conducting a safe, orderly, and phased withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from Kosovo." Warner, a noted GOP internationalist (at least until last week), appears to have an ally in another vaunted Republican internationalist: George W. Bush. The presumptive Republican nominee's spokesman recently told *The New York Times* that Bush would like an "orderly withdrawal from places like Bosnia and Kosovo" and that Europeans should be the peacekeepers in the region. With internationalists like these....

LATIN AMERICAN BEAUTY: Democracy, we're often told, has at long last come to Latin America—where the people now elect their heads of state in every country but Cuba. If only all those elections were free. Take Peru, whose current president, Alberto Fujimori, appears well on his way to winning a third term in elections scheduled for April 9. For starters, Fujimori's candidacy is by its very existence an insult to democracy. After a pro-Fujimori congress rewrote Peru's constitution in 1992 to allow the country's president to serve two terms instead of only one, in 1997 Fujimori—then near the end of that second consecutive term—had his henchmen in congress pass a measure allowing him to serve a third term. The justification? Fujimori was first elected president

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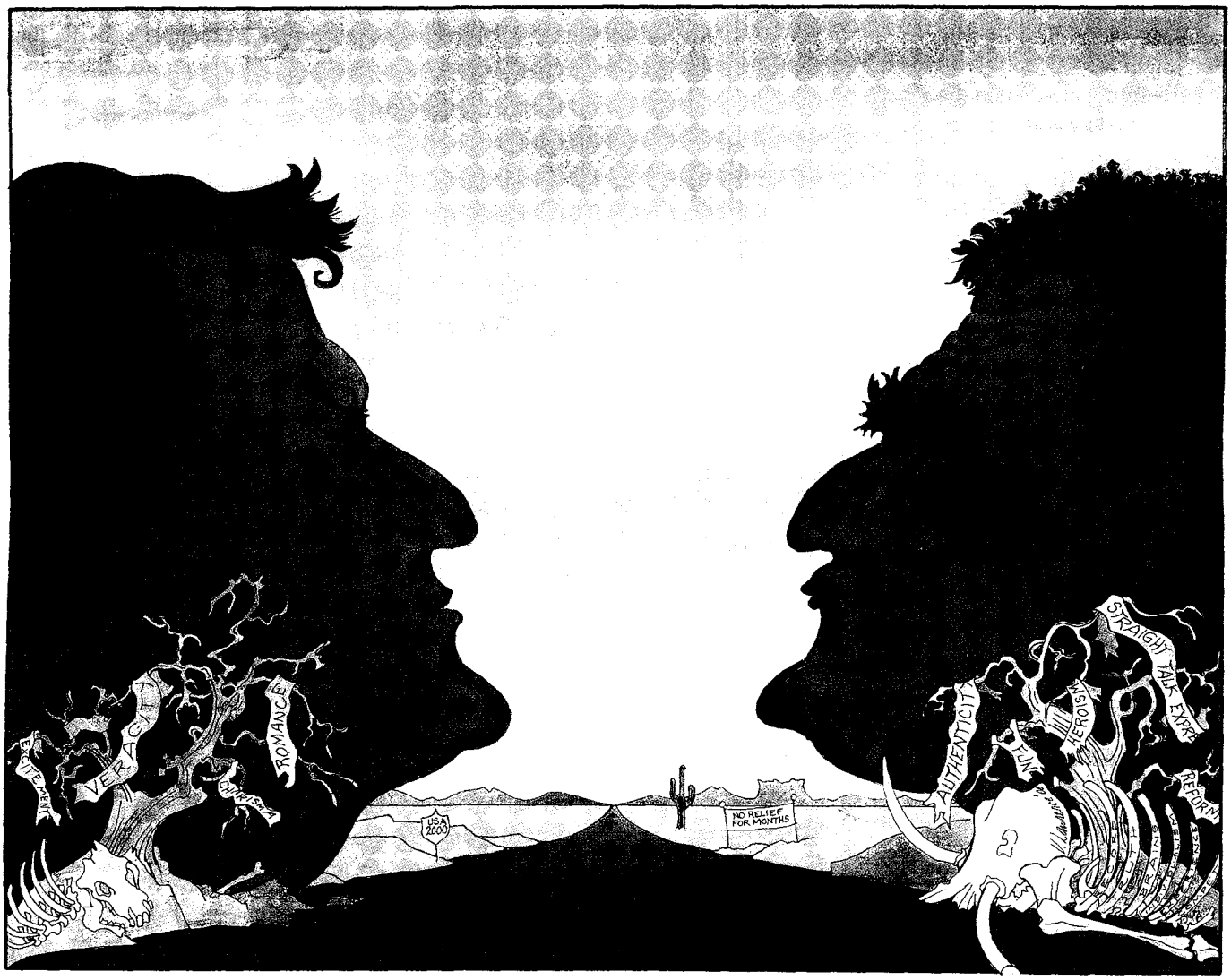
in 1990, before the constitution was rewritten to allow only two terms, so his first term in office shouldn't really count. Not surprisingly, three judges on Peru's constitutional tribunal didn't buy this argument and tried to block the measure. So the congress removed them. And, if this weren't bad enough, now that Fujimori is running for a third term, he is, shall we say, taking full advantage of the powers of incumbency. Opposition candidates have been harassed with tax audits. The media (dominated by government and private-sector stations and papers loyal to Fujimori) has given the opposition almost no coverage. In November, for example, Fujimori's campaign enjoyed 80 percent of the TV election reporting. To further stack the deck, a complex ballot has been introduced that, if filled out incorrectly, will be automatically invalidated; a poll shows that one-third of voters do not know how to fill it out, a situation that favors Fujimori. Little wonder, then, that a recent survey conducted by Datum International found that two-thirds of Peruvians believe the presidential election will unfairly favor one candidate. If only the Clinton administration concurred. Aside from a politely worded statement from the State Department calling for the Fujimori government to "move vigorously to meet its commitments to organizing free, fair, and transparent elections," the Clinton administration has been silent on Fujimori's strong-arm tactics. The $112 million in American foreign aid that Peru is supposed to receive this year looks safe. Maybe some of it can pay for Fujimori's victory party.

McCAIN SUCK-UP WATCH: Now that John McCain has become perhaps the most popular politician in America, all those Republicans who said nasty things about him are doing a little fence-mending. Here is the first installment of what we hope will be a regular series:

> "He ran a great race. It may shock all of you to hear that we even had a softball team together years ago. It was called a 'Mc' team."
>
> *—Kentucky Senator and National Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman Mitch McConnell, McCain's longtime campaign finance reform nemesis, on ABC's "This Week," March 12.* ■

VINT'S WEEK



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Campaign Journal

Weather Vain

By MICHELLE COTTLE

HEAR THAT RUSH of wind? That's virtue czar William Bennett's sigh of relief that the nominating scrum between his good buddies George W. Bush and John McCain is finally over. If the GOP's roller-coaster primary season was a drain on the candidates, just think how grueling it must have been for Bennett. As a self-described adviser to both W. and McCain, Bennett was a constant presence on the chat-show circuit, offering his avowedly neutral inside view of the race but all the while subtly shifting his spin to favor—and, hopefully, secure the affections of—whichever candidate happened to be riding high that day. Perhaps never before in the history of modern politics has one man made such a heroic effort to ensure that, come the end of primary season, he would still stand in the good graces of his party's nominee—regardless of who that might be.

Early in the race, when the stakes were low and the outcome far from clear, Bennett was not only advising McCain and Bush but also whispering in the ear of Elizabeth Dole. As he later explained to Larry King, "Whenever anybody in this party asks for any help, I'll offer it." So in October, when W. had to give an important speech on education, Bennett chipped in with the writing, then followed up with an op-ed in *The New York Times* praising the candidate for mouthing words Bennett had helped pen. Likewise, in January, Bennett lent his authorial hand to a McCain speech on citizenship, then lent his physical presence to the actual event—introducing the senator before the New Hampshire crowd.

But none of this, Bennett asserted on chat show after chat show, meant he was actually endorsing anyone. When "Hardball" host Chris Matthews interpreted Bennett's New Hampshire appearance with McCain as a sign that the former education secretary was throwing his moral authority behind the senator, Bennett rushed to set the record straight. "No, no, no, no, I'm not," he stammered. "I was standing behind McCain. I'm not backing McCain.... I'm not endorsing anybody. Most of these guys are people I know very well. But I know them both and like them." Bennett's semantics, Matthews teased, were "as slick as Clinton."

As the race heated up, though, Bennett's self-vaunted neutrality seemed to slip, and he began to look more and more like a political weather vane, pivoting toward the hot candidate of the moment. After W.'s win in South Carolina, Bennett popped up on television and in the papers to cheer the new "fighting George Bush," a man Bennett had previously called "crimped" and "cramped." "No, I don't think he needs to change his strategy," asserted Bennett, when asked by ABC's Diane Sawyer if Bush's rightward shift, exemplified by his appearance at Bob Jones University, would hurt the Texas governor in Michigan. But three days later, after McCain captured Michigan, Bennett began touting the senator as the GOP's best hope: "You can make the call right now that it is pretty clear that John McCain is a better bet for winning the presidency for the Republicans than George Bush," Bennett told the *Los Angeles Times*. What's more, Bush's strategy in South Carolina was now a problem: "If you're broadening the base, you don't go to Bob Jones," Bennett told CNN's Wolf Blitzer. "If you're a compassionate conservative, you go to a different kind of place."

DAVID COWLES

Bennett stuck to this line even after McCain's inflammatory February 28 speech in Virginia Beach, in which the senator denounced evangelical leaders Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as "agents of intolerance" and compared them to Al Sharpton and Louis Farrakhan.

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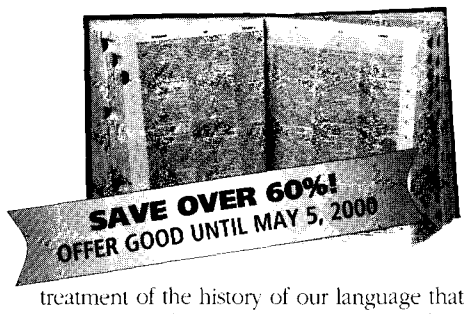

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The following morning, as voters in Virginia and Washington state headed to the polls, Bennett shared his decidedly nonjudgmental reaction to McCain's speech with ABC's Sawyer: the senator's slap at Falwell and Robertson was "a rocket. We'll see whether it's a booster or a backfire, where it explodes, and who it explodes on." It was clearly a "high-risk" move, said Bennett, but "the rest of the speech, which isn't getting much attention, is a pretty interesting and thoughtful speech about the need for religious moderation."

Less than 48 hours later, however, after Bush's huge, Christian-conservative-fueled win in Virginia revealed that the speech had indeed backfired, a scathing Bennett op-ed appeared in the March 2 *Wall Street Journal*, decrying McCain's assault on the religious right. "The blast against Messrs. Robertson and Falwell," wrote Bennett, "is the worst manifestation of an emerging pattern with Mr. McCain. He often portrays those with whom he disagrees as not just wrong but wicked." Bennett's dramatic and very public flip-flop was ostensibly sparked by a comment McCain made on the Straight Talk Express the day after his Virginia Beach speech, accusing Falwell and Robertson of exerting an "evil influence" on the GOP. The charge, fumed Bennett in the *Journal*, was "highly irresponsible," "intemperate," "self-destructive," and "unwarranted," and it "has no place in American political discourse."

But why was McCain's offhand remark aboard his campaign bus any more "over the line" than a high-profile, carefully prepared speech likening Robertson and Falwell to Farrakhan and Sharpton? Maybe McCain's use of the word "evil" really did send Bennett to his writing desk. A cynical observer, however, might suspect that Bennett's change of heart had less to do with McCain's poor choice of words than with his changed political fortunes. The moment it became clear that the senator would lose in Virginia and Washington on February 29, the pundits began writing his political obituary. Bennett, in turn, may have seen McCain's follow-up jab at the right as his chance to reingratiate himself with the Bush campaign by publicly kicking McCain while he was safely down but not officially out.

In either case, Bennett's high-wire act seems to have paid off. Sure, the McCain folk are displeased. "What most of us kind of thought after watching the endless to and fro was that Bill ought to just shut up and take a fucking side," grumbles McCain strategist Mike Murphy. But who cares what the loser thinks; what matters is that the Bush camp apparently harbors no grudges against Bennett for his earlier McCain flirtations. Although he declined to discuss specifics, Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer noted that the governor's campaign would be "honored" by any additional involvement with Bennett. Meanwhile, Robert Novak is flitting around Washington hawking Bennett as a W. running mate. (He's a party elder, he radiates un-Clintonian morality, *and* he's Catholic!) And, although it remains to be seen what new role, if any, Bennett will assume with Team Bush, those nerve-racking days of currying favor with both candidates are safely behind him. With McCain out of the running, Bennett can peel off that leotard, climb down off the tightrope he's been walking for the past several months, and join the rest of the GOP establishment in unabashedly smooching W.'s belatedly anointed backside. ■

Affirmative action, IMF style.

Fund and Games

By Alexandra Starr

When Michel Camdessus announced his plan last November to step down as managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), there was no shortage of distinguished candidates to replace him. Giuliano Amato, a former Italian prime minister and current treasury minister, won accolades for his budget reforms; Leszek Balcerowicz, the deputy prime minister of Poland, designed his country's transition to the free market and has firsthand knowledge of what it's like to deal with the IMF as a client. And most distinguished of all was a man already at the organization: American Stanley Fischer, widely regarded as one of the world's most brilliant macroeconomists. Colleagues launch into panegyrics when they describe Fischer's decisiveness, his tough but fair style, and his willingness to stand up to Third World despots and U.S. Treasury officials alike. And, as acting managing director since Camdessus left last month, Fischer would only have had to move down the hall.

But Fischer and the others lacked the qualification that mattered most: a German passport. For years, the top jobs at the world's major international institutions have been apportioned according to a strict, if unwritten, system: the presidency of the World Bank goes to an American, the secretary general of the United Nations is plucked from the Third World, and the number-one slots at NATO and the IMF are reserved for the major European powers. In practice, the managing director of the IMF has usually been French. But this year, with a Brit heading up NATO, an Italian as president of the European Commission, and a Frenchman slated to lead the European Central Bank, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder decided to claim the IMF for Deutschland. Which was unfortunate, since Germany doesn't have a very good candidate—at least not one Schröder is willing to nominate. But Germany turned its mediocre candidates (the second of whom seems certain to get the position) into a test of national pride. And so perhaps the most important international economic job in the world has been sacrificed on the altar of diplomatic affirmative action.

Schröder's first choice, German Deputy Treasury Secretary Caio Koch-Weser, was a longtime World Bank bureaucrat with experience in development rather than international finance. And U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, who overlapped with Koch-Weser when Sum-

Alexandra Starr is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C.

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mers was the bank's chief economist, reportedly felt that the German hadn't even been particularly good at development work. Yet, despite heavy hints from the United States, Schröder persisted in pushing Koch-Weser forward—forcing the Clinton administration to make an international scene by publicly opposing him. And the U.S. announcement had its intended effect: after he failed to win a majority in an IMF board straw poll, Koch-Weser withdrew his name from consideration.

But, though it went to the mat to kill Koch-Weser's candidacy, the Clinton administration ultimately proved to have only half a spine. Even as it became obvious that most experts, and even most diplomats, believed Fischer would make the best IMF managing director, President Clinton effectively sank his candidacy by announcing, "I will not support an American candidate, even though I have enormous respect for Mr. Fischer." And when Schröder produced yet another unscintillating choice, Horst Köhler, the United States quickly gave him the green light—practically ensuring that Köhler will get the job.

Currently the president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Köhler, like Koch-Weser, is more a development man than a finance expert. He is also legendary for having the kind of temper that alienates subordinates. "I suppose it's difficult to object to his candidacy on the grounds you wouldn't want to work for him," wailed one IMF employee, who proceeded to do just that. The biggest worry is that Köhler will drive Fischer away. Though Fischer says he will stay on, some fear that run-ins with the German will change his mind—thus depriving the fund of the brains behind most of its recent bailouts.

Were the IMF just your average international bureaucracy, all this would be merely distasteful. Indeed, the national spoils system came into being when the fund was just such a lesser player—and when cold war politics, not economic criteria, drove relations between the First World and the Third. But today, when national governments take their lending cues from the IMF's economic analyses and the organization takes the lead in responding to currency crises that threaten the world economy, viewing IMF directors as national representatives and thus risking mediocrity is reckless. It's also incoherent—since, for many of the men and women who work for international organizations, citizenship is no longer an indicator of general outlook or anything else. Fischer, for instance, was born to Jewish parents of Eastern European descent, spent most of his youth in Zambia, and studied in Britain before moving to the United States and becoming an American citizen. Similarly, Jim Wolfensohn, the "American" president of the World Bank, was formerly a citizen of Australia.

Perhaps even more troublesome is the way the IMF selection process ignores the Third World nations the fund is supposed to serve. Early on, Third World leaders made it clear that Fischer was their top choice, which is remarkable given that he designed many of the tough economic-austerity packages with which they were forced to comply. (And it's even more remarkable given his ethnicity: it's not every day that Libya, Syria, and Iraq rally behind an

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American Jew.) But the Third World's opinion held little water in First World capitals.

That's particularly unfortunate because the IMF is an organization under fire. A number of respected economists have questioned some of the central assumptions behind its austerity packages, arguing that they do more harm than good. And a U.S. congressional commission recently recommended that the fund completely revamp the way it does business, limiting its lending to only those countries in the worst shape. To regain its intellectual and political authority, the fund will need wise leadership. Too bad the West didn't care enough to give it any. ■

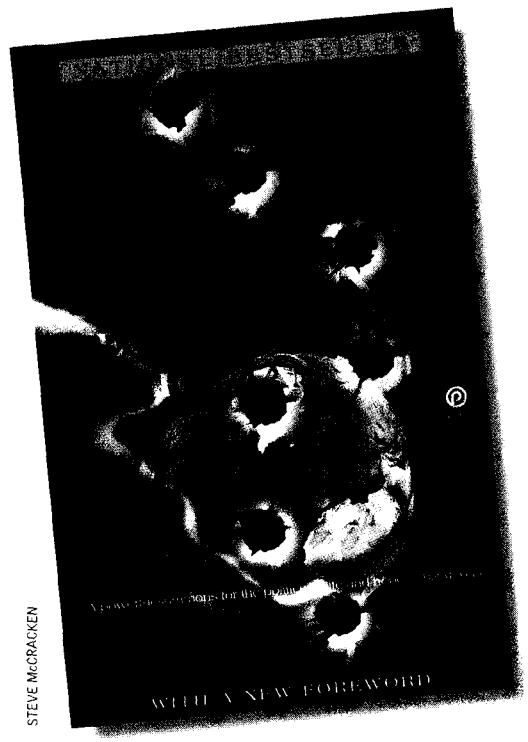
Republicans reread "Earth in the Balance."

Book Party

By FRANKLIN FOER

BOOK PUBLICISTS DON'T usually try to avoid publicity. But Houghton Mifflin flack Walter Vatter has been charged with downplaying Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance*, which the publishing house will re-release this May. And he's doing a great job. In fact, except for a brief notice buried in *Publishers Weekly*, the 1992 book's return to the market has been a well-guarded secret. "We're very careful when we talk about all of our books by vice presidents of the United States," Vatter says. And he won't say much more. Lob him a softball—Why are you republishing the book?—and he whiffs. "I am not allowed to comment on that in any regard. That's what I am told."

You can understand the Gore camp's jitters. According to conservative activist Grover Norquist, Republicans plan to make *Earth in the Balance* a centerpiece of their campaign strategy. "We'll tie it around the neck of our friend," Norquist cackles. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Republican National Committee have already culled dozens of quotes from the tome and faxed them to surrogates across the country. Republican strategists predict that ads quoting the book—produced by either the RNC or industry groups—will begin appearing on your TV screen by summer. And Norquist's website offers a demented preview: it compares Gore's criticisms of modern life to choice excerpts from the Unabomber's manifesto.



STEVE McCRACKEN

We've heard this kind of thing before. Ever since the book first appeared, Republicans have used it to ridicule Gore as a geek, a worshiper of New Age hokum, an alarmist, and a world-class flake. During the 1992 campaign, then-President Bush dubbed Gore "Ozone Man," and no less an authority than Dan Quayle pronounced *Earth in the Balance* "hysterical." Quayle even tried to bring the book to a vice presidential debate, though he backed down when Gore threatened to bring a potato. Last year, Republican congressmen took turns reading excerpts from the book on the House floor for C-SPAN's cameras. (They will reprise this stunt later this session.) The libertarian Competitiveness Enterprise Institute (CEI) has baked fortune cookies containing sayings from Gore's oeuvre. And, at a recent fund-raiser, RNC Chair Jim Nicholson hawked copies of the book along with an "environmentally safe, non-ozone-depleting candle to read it by."

This year the GOP thinks it has an additional hook. For one thing, there's the recent rise in gas prices. Using *Earth in the Balance* to bolster his case, Nicholson puts it this way: "People are paying two dollars a gallon for home heating fuel—and he wants to add new taxes to fuel-oil consumption in America, and he wants to diminish domestic exploration." According to another RNC operative, the party plans to hit Gore hardest on this issue during the summer, as people pull out of their driveways to go on vacation.

The Republicans will also use the book to rile up their evangelical base, which instinctively distrusts environmentalism's "false gods." According to Jonathan Adler of CEI, which has supplied its research on Gore to the RNC, "You'll hear the book attacked lots on Christian radio. They're not very fond of the book's New Agey bent." Meanwhile, Norquist says, industry will mount a campaign "to talk to their workers and their shareholders to describe how they'll suffer under Gore. We'll leaflet plants to let them know that Gore will kill their jobs." In states that manufacture cars and parts, especially Michigan and Ohio, Republicans will blare Gore's famous call to abolish the internal combustion engine. And in contested states that produce coal—Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania—there's talk of making hay of Gore's hostility to strip mining.

BUT THE ATTACKS may backfire. Steve Hayward, a conservative environmentalist advising George W. Bush's campaign, admits it will be difficult to attack the book without sounding like an EPA basher in the Tom DeLay mode. An all-out GOP attack could bloody Gore, but it could also impair Bush's efforts to paint himself as a paragon of sensible centrism and reform. And it

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would almost certainly draw attention to W.'s own muddy environmental record in Texas. One Bush aide even conceded that the RNC's attack will be "a tough case to make."

All of which makes it so strange that the Gore campaign seems to consider *Earth in the Balance* a liability. Gore has so far avoided discussing the environment, passing up easy hits against Bush's record. And even centrist talk about sprawl has fallen to the side. This follows a pattern. As far back as 1992, the Gore campaign seemed spooked by the book. On the trail that year, Gore assured reporters that Bill Clinton didn't endorse his policy proposals. And the Democratic National Committee assigned a staffer, Jonathan Sallet, to write a memo predicting Republican criticisms of the book. ("If Al Gore has his way, we would give up America's jobs and destroy the economy.") Somehow, the Sallet memo landed in Dick Armey's office and then in *The Wall Street Journal.*

In 1992, the Republicans did launch the attacks Sallet had predicted, and they fell flat. But Gore's advisers still seem nervous about this year's barrage. When I asked a Gore staffer about the book's reissue, she replied, "Where did you hear about that?... I didn't think that was supposed to be out there." And Gore may be poised to distance himself once again from some proposals in the book. In light of today's high gas prices, for instance, he has avoided reiterating its call for new fuel taxes. There are several ways for Gore to untether himself from such statements. In *National Journal,* Jonathan Rauch has suggested that Gore dismiss *Earth in the Balance* as a youthful indiscretion. Or, to put it less dramatically, he could simply note that, as vice president, he's struck a pragmatic pose on the environment. He's made no effort to ban either the Ford Explorer or hair spray. Then again, that's no guarantee Grover Norquist won't say he has. ■

Whatever happened to noblesse oblige?

Top Down

By JOHN B. JUDIS

JOHN MCCAIN'S REMARKABLE success in the presidential primaries proves once and for all what so many commentators have long denied: Americans care about political reform. McCain, running on his call to reclaim Washington from "special interests," inspired more passion than any presidential candidate in a generation. But he still lost. The Republican establishment, with striking unanimity, rallied behind George W. Bush and helped push him across the finish line.

The cause of reform may still endure, but it won't finally lead to results without something McCain and other reform advocates have sorely lacked: the support of a different kind of establishment, one whose members place the country's welfare above their financial self-interest and who see themselves as disinterested stewards of the nation's well-being rather than as advocates for their parochial concerns. These kinds of leaders exist, but they are overshadowed by those who flocked to Bush's standard.

At the same time as McCain was beginning his campaign, campaign finance reform got an unexpected boost from something called the Committee for Economic Development. CED not only endorsed McCain's proposal for an end to soft money, it embraced an even more radical reform: public financing of congressional campaigns. "Americans understand the influence of money," wrote Edward A. Kangas, who led CED's effort. "It's time to give elections back to democracy's shareholders—the voters." The group that drew up CED's plan included retired executives from companies like General Electric and Allied Signal, plus an investment banker from Goldman Sachs—that is, representatives from companies that have benefited from the existing campaign finance system. Kangas himself is global chairman of the board of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, an accounting firm that has more than a passing interest in the way Congress crafts tax legislation.

CED's appeal seemed remarkable—financial elites don't usually take positions like this. In fact, we no longer even expect them to. But it wasn't always this way. Corporate leaders used to routinely serve on policy boards and commissions that advocated positions irrelevant, or inimical, to the businesses they represented. In the early twentieth century, businessmen, bankers, and lawyers—acting either on their own or through organizations like CED—financed Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party, championed child-labor restrictions and workers'-compensation legislation, and encouraged collective bargaining between labor and business. Business leaders lobbied for Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and cheered the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Today, these kinds of leaders, and this kind of organization, have become the exception. Few Washington politicians know Edward Kangas, but they know J. Patrick Rooney, CEO of the Golden Rule Insurance Company and tireless promoter of its medical savings accounts. And they know the Business Roundtable, intrepid advocate for the Fortune 500. The foot soldiers of the old establishment were Ivy League lawyers and corporate leaders roused to public service. The foot soldiers of the new establishment are Ivy League lawyers and businessmen summoned to the lobbying firms that dot Washington's K Street. This is bad for democracy; it keeps Washington from turning popular discontent into rational, enlightened public policy. And, unless

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it changes, the John McCains of American politics will continue to lose.

THE IDEA OF an American elite goes back at least to the Revolution, to the ideal of the gentleman whose political action is not motivated by personal gain. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson said, cultivated a perfect "disinterestedness." The gentleman-politician was supposed to stand above party, class, faction, and region; to subsume these divisions under a higher idea of national purpose; to feel, as Alexander Hamilton put it, "a neutrality to the rivalships between the different branches of industry ... to prove an impartial arbiter between them, ready to promote either, so far as it shall appear to him conducive to the general interests of society."

This concept fell into disfavor among Jacksonian Democrats, who identified it with the anti-democratic, upper-class Federalists, but it was revived after the Civil War by the Mugwumps and then by the great Progressive reformers. Its champions included Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, J.P. Morgan and Company bankers George Perkins and Willard Straight, NEW REPUBLIC founder Herbert Croly, columnist Walter Lippmann, and lawyer Louis Brandeis. Brandeis's protégé Felix Frankfurter praised Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal for having "more intelligent and more purposeful and more disinterested men in the service of the government than there has been for at least half a century." In its twentieth-century incarnation, America's high-minded elite wasn't confined to the upper class; it extended to anyone who exercised decent, rational public leadership—including labor officials of humble origins, like Samuel Gompers, Sidney Hillman, and Walter Reuther.

The Progressive version of a disinterested elite grew out of the corporate capitalism of the late nineteenth century. That capitalism had undermined America's older democratic ideal, based on the diffusion of small-property ownership, by creating vast differences in wealth and power. In response, socialists called for revolution, while conservatives insisted inequality was the price of industrial progress. Roosevelt, Wilson, and the new elites took a different tack: They sought to redefine democracy for their new time. It would be based on forcing capital and labor to meet halfway, on seeking to eliminate through government action the gross evils and inequities of the new capitalism without abolishing capitalism itself. In words McCain might have spoken this year, Wilson declared in 1912 that "[t]he business of government is to organize the common interest against the special interests."

The most important Progressive elite organization was the National Civic Federation, founded in 1900. It included labor leaders from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) as well as leading businessmen, ministers, and academics. It promoted collective bargaining between business and labor and championed laws regulating child labor and public utilities. Its first chairman was Mark Hanna, a Cleveland industrialist turned Republican senator who, thanks to high school history texts and Newt Gingrich, has been unfairly cast as a champion of robber-baron capitalism. Said Hanna of the federation's mission, "We must get right down to the belief that life is a matter of mutual interest between labor and capital.... There will always be neutral ground where conflicting interests can meet and confer and adjust themselves—a sort of Hague tribunal, if you please, in the everyday affairs of life."

The key instrument for accommodating capital and labor within the new capitalism was social science. The Progressive elites established research organizations—including the Russell Sage, Rockefeller, and Carnegie foundations, the Twentieth Century Fund, and the Brookings Institution—that promoted the same objectives as the National Civic Federation. Major newspapers and magazines such as *The New York Times* and THE NEW REPUBLIC cultivated a similarly disinterested outlook. In 1935, two years after he took over *The Washington Post*, Eugene Meyer promised that "the newspaper shall not be the ally of any special interest, but shall be fair and free and wholesome in its outlook on public affairs and public men."

In marked contrast to today's K Street firms, these elite institutions defined themselves as above class and self-interest. They most definitely did not see themselves as lobbies. Many of them, like the National Civic Federation, included leaders of labor and other popular organizations along with the leaders of business and finance; the National Bureau of Economic Research in the 1940s had an AFL economist as its vice president. Most important of all, the elite organizations did not undermine democracy. On the contrary, they helped expand political participation and widen the definition of public interest. The Ford Foundation single-handedly funded the early environmental and consumer movements, which were themselves inspired by Ralph Nader, a Harvard Law School graduate who saw himself as a successor to Brandeis. By the early '70s, Ford was providing 50 percent of all public-policy grants, 86 percent of grants to public-interest law organizations, 83 percent of grants to civil rights groups, and 77 percent of grants to organize political action by citizens.

THIS OLDER ELITE, with roots in the Progressive era, began to wither in the late '60s. The first assault came from New Left activists and intellectuals, who blamed "the best and the brightest" for the Vietnam War. Disinterested advocacy and objective social science, they charged, were simply a cloak for capitalism at home and imperialism abroad. Its confidence undermined by the left, the old establishment soon faced an even more profound challenge from the right. Business leaders, frightened by labor militancy and the new consumer and environmental movements and worried by growing foreign competition and falling profits, felt their interests were under attack. Remaining aloof from class conflict seemed increasingly dangerous; businessmen had to defend themselves. They set up aggressive new lobbying organizations like the Business Roundtable and the Council for Capital Formation, which soon overshadowed older, smaller, and less well-funded groups like CED. They set up corporate offices and hired lobbyists. In 1971, only 175 businesses had registered lobbyists in Washington. By 1982, as many as 2,445 did.

Before the '70s, most big-business executives were Rockefeller or Eisenhower Republicans. In 1964, business gener-

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ally backed Lyndon Johnson against Barry Goldwater. But, by the late '70s, many business leaders, identifying the Democrats with labor unions and consumer and environmental activists, were making peace with conservative Republicans. Prodded by conservative intellectuals like William Simon and Irving Kristol, business began shifting its funds away from the older elite institutions like Brookings and CED and into conservative organizations like the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation. These new groups adopted the vocabulary of the older elites—they called themselves "institutes," "councils," or "foundations"—but they functioned as lobbies for business and, in some cases, as political factions within the Republican Party. They were not disinterested. They did not attempt to reconcile business with labor or consumers. They spoke the language of social science but often simply used social-science tools to justify lobbying or factional agendas.

Just as the left charged that the ideal of disinterestedness rationalized conservative politics (Gabriel Kolko titled his 1963 revisionist history of the Progressive era *The Triumph of Conservatism*), the Republican conservatives of the '70s repeatedly charged that the old elites were not "disinterested" but "liberal." In 1977, Henry Ford II resigned from the board of trustees of the Ford Foundation to protest its hostility to business. In 1979, the foundation's new president abruptly withdrew its funding from public-interest law firms in Washington. In 1976, *New York Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger fired editorial-page editor John Oakes because he thought Oakes's views were anti-business. Media outlets began providing representatives of the business-conservative organizations "equal time" with representatives of the older elite institutions—as if they simply represented different, equally unbiased viewpoints.

DISTINGUISHED FORMER PUBLIC officials—who a generation earlier would have moved seamlessly into the old establishment—signed up with the new business think tanks or K Street lobbying firms. Some, like former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Alexander Haig, set up consulting firms that represented businesses and foreign governments. Some, like former Attorney General Elliot Richardson, headed lobbying coalitions. As respected members of the nation's elite, they enjoyed a certain deference—from a public and a media who identified them not by their current occupations but by their former service. They were seen as trusted, dispassionate experts in trade, foreign affairs, or antitrust law, but when they spoke or wrote it was difficult to disentangle their opinions from those of their private clients.

The new business-conservative organizations deeply undermined the old establishment. But they didn't replace it with a true counter-establishment, because they never gained the public esteem enjoyed by the old elites. Instead, they undermined the very notion that a select group of distinguished men and women who possessed superior knowledge and experience would place the nation's interests first. As it became clear that many of Washington's foremost experts and institutions were for sale, the public's view of them, and of the permanent Washington elite more broadly, became more and more cynical. Politicians exploited this cynicism with a new anti-Washington populism, but when Clinton in 1993 and then Gingrich in 1995 turned their backs on the political reforms they had promised, public disenchantment with politics and government deepened still further.

IN THE 1990S, the "counter-establishment" that originated in the '70s grew even more corrupt and irresponsible. If AEI and Heritage represented the typical counter-elite of the late '70s, Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE) and the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) are the archetypal organizations of today. AEI funded supply-side economics and exaggerated the damage of government regulation, but it still put out scholarly work. The new institutions, by contrast, merely produce propaganda for their funders. In 1998, CEI, which is backed by oil companies but claims the objectivity of an "institute," ran a radio ad making the patently false claim that "thousands of scientists agree there's no solid evidence of a global-warming problem." Such a statement was not founded on biased or inadequate scientific research; it was purely a statement of business self-interest. CSE, chaired by former Bush administration official C. Boyden Gray, doesn't even pretend to develop expert opinion on the nation's future; it simply serves as a front for lobbying campaigns by corporations against environmental regulations or antitrust efforts. When corporations don't want to lobby in their own names, Gray offers them CSE.

Many of the businessmen and financiers who got rich during the '80s and '90s in information technology, entertainment, and currency speculation have shaped the "counter-establishment" in their own image. Like their nineteenth-century forebears, these tycoons espouse a laissez-faire politics that neatly fits their business self-interest. Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen, cable magnate John C. Malone, Federal Express Chairman Frederick Smith, and speculators like K. Tucker Andersen support the Cato Institute, which opposes virtually all government intervention in the economy. Microsoft has embraced CSE. In an interview before his death last year, economist Herbert Stein—who worked with CED for two decades—said, "I think there was a period when there were businessmen outside the government who had some authority and who were respected, and who had a genuine national patriotic concern with the problems of the country. I can't think of a single name now of such a person."

The replacement of a public-spirited elite with a narrowly self-interested one has occurred in law firms and the media as well. In the '60s, corporate law firms had to promise Ivy League graduates that they could devote part of their time to pro bono work. Now such firms have become "profit centers," and law graduates shun the ones that still emphasize public service. When Stanford Law School Professor Robert Gordon asked partners in big law firms why they no longer offered associates a chance to do public-interest law, they told him, "Too many of the most talented associates we would like to attract to the firm only pay attention to the bottom line." Young lawyers increasingly work on Capitol Hill or serve in government to gain the experience to become high-

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priced lobbyists. Even the elite media, trapped in an increasingly desperate battle for market share and advertising dollars, has abandoned its traditional sense of civic responsibility and turned more and more of its attention to scandal, popular culture, and lifestyle.

Most important, the decline of the disinterested elite has affected government's work. As late as the '80s, Congress and the White House could still safely resort to those esteemed creatures of the Progressive era: government-appointed commissions of business leaders, former officials, and policy experts that would tackle problems on which politicians couldn't reach agreement. But such commissions cannot work if representatives of business act simply to protect the interests of their corporations. When Congress and the White House could not agree in 1998 on whether or how to tax sales made over the Internet, congressional leaders and the White House appointed the private Advisory Commission on Electronic Commerce to suggest a proposal. Republican leaders in Congress stacked the commission with lobbyists like Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform and Stan Sokul of the Direct Marketing Association. Together, Norquist, Sokul, and several business representatives, relying on a requirement that the commission reach a two-thirds majority, have so far kept it from seriously considering a proposal to tax purchases made over the Internet, even though a majority on the commission favor it.

The new K Street elite has also created gridlock in Congress itself, turning most progressive proposals into battles between business and labor and making enlightened compromise—on issues ranging from health care to campaign finance—rare. In 1946, liberal Democrats proposed an overly ambitious bill for full employment. Republicans and Southern Democrats blocked it in Congress, but CED engineered a constructive compromise, the Employment Act of 1946, which created, among other things, the Council of Economic Advisors. By contrast, in 1994, when Clinton's equally ambitious health care plan came under withering attack from Republicans in Congress and the health-insurance lobby, no similar elite organization was able to advance a compromise. The bill died, and along with it the opportunity for comprehensive reform.

Will things change? Probably—the question is how. The lesson of the McCain surge, like the Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan, and even Gingrich boomlets before it, is that in America today there exists a deep popular antagonism toward Washington special interests, and that sentiment can be mobilized for various agendas—from the nativist right to the libertarian center to the protectionist left. In times of prosperity, like today, this antagonism is relatively benign. In times of recession, like the early '90s, it is a vehicle for uglier resentments. We are today in a moment not unlike that of the early twentieth century. Mass anger at special interests continues to well up, creating the potential for demagoguery but also for genuine reform. With John McCain returning to Washington after his national crusade against its corrupt and arrogant ways, the moment for a new public-spirited establishment is ripe. For all our sakes, business and labor, liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican, let's hope it doesn't go to waste. ■

Why China will get democracy too.

Same Difference

By ROBERT WRIGHT

> "By joining the WTO, China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products; it is agreeing to import one of democracy's most cherished values—economic freedom.... We know how much the Internet has changed America, and we are already an open society. Imagine how much it could change China."
>
> —Bill Clinton

> "Perhaps some day we can drop the idealistic blather and admit that trade with China is not about democracy; it's about trade."
>
> —Robert Kagan

LET'S GRANT ROBERT KAGAN—a conservative columnist who opposes President Clinton's policy of engagement—his wish. Let's stipulate that much of the political muscle behind the drive to normalize trade relations with China comes from those who profit from trade, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. And, while we're at it, let's stipulate that much of the political muscle *against* normalized trade relations also comes from those with a financial stake in the issue: labor unions. Just as the first group disingenuously claims that normalized trade would help democracy and human rights in China, the second group disingenuously claims that normalized trade would hurt democracy and human rights in China.

Now we can get on to the big question: Which side's "idealistic blather" is right? Will granting China permanent most-favored-nation status and letting it into the World Trade Organization aid or impede human rights and democracy?

Lurking beneath this question is a deeper one—usually unspoken—about whether the Chinese are, well, *different*. Some Chinese officials themselves say "Western values" are alien to Asian society; they act as if they could import economic freedom without importing its Western corollary, political freedom. And some opponents of engagement seem to believe them. They think China can remain authoritarian indefinitely while opening its economy to information

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technology—like the Internet—that has had sharply pluralizing effects in the West.

And the "China is different" school can point to what looks like compelling historical evidence. China has, for most of two millennia, preserved vast, centralized rule. It seemed to sleep through Europe's Enlightenment and industrial revolution. Its core spiritual tradition, Confucianism, has long emphasized authority and social order. And so on. Such themes have in recent years been marshaled—by the political scientist Samuel Huntington, the historian David Landes, and others—to paint a picture of Chinese culture as deeply distinctive.

In the current context, one oft-cited historical difference seems particularly ominous. The printing press, an early analogue of the Internet, greatly dispersed power in Europe, yet it had no such dramatic effect in China. But a closer look shows that this difference is not rooted in anything special about "the Chinese" and for the most part isn't rooted in "Chinese culture" per se. Understanding what it is rooted in helps explain why, this time around, the information technology revolution that is liberalizing the West will, at least in the long run, liberalize China as well.

THE UPSHOT OF Gutenberg's movable-type printing press is fairly well-known. By making mass communication cheap, the press empowered splinter groups. One noted splinter group was led by Martin Luther. In 1517, the press circulated his *95 Theses*. The rest is history.

The press was a challenge not just for big religions but for big empires. It helped Calvinists in the Netherlands rebel against Hapsburg rule and Protestants in various German states agitate against the Holy Roman Emperor. As the centuries rolled by, life grew only more perilous for multinational empires, and one big reason was the printing press.

The press helped crystallize and fortify nationalism in several ways. First, it tamped down the dialectical differences of the Middle Ages. By standardizing language across broad swaths of land, it created, in the words of political scientist Benedict Anderson, "unified fields of exchange and communication." Second, the press let news travel so fast within those fields that national groups came to be collectively self-conscious—"imagined communities," in Anderson's phrase. Third, it allowed those communities to rapidly mobilize.

The Internet is in some ways the printing press in spades. It does what the press did—lower the cost of processing information, thus easing the organization of interest groups—only more so. It can work silently and suddenly. When members of the Falun Gong spiritual sect magically materialized in Beijing to protest oppression, they were there courtesy of the Net. In theory, as the Internet penetrates more and more of Chinese society, it should spawn more and more pluralism.

But, if China is indeed susceptible to such shake-ups, why didn't the printing press shake up the country in the first place? Moveable type was invented in China centuries before it appeared in Europe. But there was no great rift within Confucianism like the rift within Christianity. There was no upheaval comparable to Europe's nationalist revolts. The monolithic rule of a vast land—which the age of print made impractical in Europe—continued in China. Why?

One reason was a vestige of an earlier technological threshold—the evolution of writing. To a large extent, the Chinese script is ideographic: characters typically stand for concepts, not sounds. So in China's "age of print"—a millennium ago, during the Sung dynasty—printers had to compose a page of text from a menu of thousands of characters, as opposed to the hundred or so that European printers would later use. This was so cumbersome that many printers preferred to use woodblocks, getting one freshly carved for each page of text.

In other words, the economics of printing in China weren't fully Gutenbergian; it took a large printing to justify the high fixed cost of a print run. It is debatable whether the first phase of Luther's rebellion—when printers in several cities took it upon themselves to do small printings of his *95 Theses*—would have made economic sense if German script were ideographic. Of course, you would still expect the widespread use of the printing press in Sung China to have pluralistic tendencies—but not *as* pluralistic as in Europe centuries later.

China's ideographic script had another key consequence. Because its symbols referred to concepts, it transcended linguistic differences. No matter how distant two Chinese, no matter how different their dialects, they could read each other's contracts, shipping bills, and correspondence, not to mention the same books and periodicals. So the press helped foster a "unified field of exchange and communication" *across* linguistic boundaries, not within them. But for this fact, linguistic differences in the age of print might have fomented nationalist sentiment, as in Europe. (The common claim that Europe's relative linguistic diversity is due to its having more geographic barriers than China loses force if you actually examine a map of China and see that it is full of mountain ranges.)

CHINA'S GOVERNMENT, FOR its part, had long worked to reinforce the naturally unifying effect of an ideographic script. It kept the script standardized across dialects even as phonetic elements crept in. It had also, back in the seventh century, built the Grand Canal, which linked the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, keeping China economically cohesive. But perhaps the main reason the printing press didn't prove more disruptive is that, in two senses, the government responded deftly to the challenge it posed.

First, the government showed religious tolerance. In the Sung era, some preachers did circulate printed tracts advancing upstart theologies. Chinese authorities could have viewed this as a threat to Confucianism, the official state philosophy. But, as the historian Peter C. Perdue has noted, they proved more liberal than the Christian authorities of 1517, allowing people to worship their own deities so long as their religious practice didn't upset the social order.

The second government adjustment to the pluralizing tendencies of print was what you might call institutionalized pluralism. When literacy spreads across a nation, power usually does, too. (That's why, during the U.S. Civil War, it was illegal in some Southern states to teach blacks to read.) China's Sung government, facing a growing—and increasingly affluent—literate class, reformed itself in ways that at

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once acknowledged this diffusion of power and controlled it.

The government catered to the new literati by making entry to the civil service more meritocratic. This diminished nepotism and, along with a widening market-based prosperity, eroded the power of China's hereditary elite. As the historian Charles O. Hucker has said of this period, "The role of printing in the social leveling process can hardly be overemphasized."

In a sense, the government was just co-opting the literate class. In studying for civil-service exams, young men had to master Confucian doctrines that would make them obedient servants of social stability. Still, in exchange for this service, the government granted real influence; during Sung times the civil service, now more broadly representative of the population, acquired unprecedented power. As the historian Jacques Gernet noted, "The emperors themselves played only a secondary role, leaving the limelight to their ministers." The government also ventilated itself. Three separate agencies were charged with assessing citizens' complaints, a process elaborately insulated from the emperor's interference.

Broadly speaking, then, China responded to its print revolution in the same way that President Clinton hopes it will respond to the Internet revolution. First, it used information technology to prosper; the press helped spread technical knowledge, and growing literacy lubricated commerce and entrepreneurship. (Sung China was way ahead of the West technologically and economically.) Second, the resulting diffusion of power across the society had a pluralizing effect, forcing the central government to become more broadly responsive to citizens. To be sure, the Sung era didn't give rise to a modern representative democracy. Then again, Europe's printing press—unveiled around 1450—didn't accomplish that overnight, either.

On the other hand, Western Europe did *eventually* get modern representative democracy and extensive political liberties. What happened to China? Among other things, the Ming dynasty.

In thumbnail histories, the Ming era, which stretched from 1368 to 1644, is depicted as a time of technological stagnation, authoritarianism, and a kind of solipsism, famously symbolized in 1433, when China ended oceanic exploration and started shunning foreign contact. In truth, these themes are a bit overdrawn. Still, skeptics of Clinton's engagement policy might well ask why, if China is now expected to follow the logic of Western economic and political development, it didn't do so earlier. Why did it spend much of a millennium failing to achieve what the West achieved: an industrial revolution and liberal democracy? Can we, as Landes argued in *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, attribute this stunted growth to something deep within China's cultural character?

My own answer—no—is laid out in a chapter of my book *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*. (That part of the book is available at *www.nonzero.org/asia.htm*.) The Cliffs Notes version of my argument can be seen in a simple dynamic that many historians (even Landes, oddly) accept but whose full import is rarely drawn out. That dynamic is competitive development. Because Europe fragmented into many distinct but interactive polities, stagnation was not a luxury rulers could afford. The neighborhood was too crowded; if you didn't advance technologically and economically and grant the freedoms required for such advancement, you would get squashed. Though Ming China did face foreign threats—including annoyingly persistent barbarians—it didn't have nearly the incentive for "defensive modernization" that European states did.

Besides, even if China *had* felt more motivated, it wouldn't have had many neighbors to draw ideas from. Europe, by contrast, was a hotbed of competitive laboratories for inventing new technologies, new economic theories, new political ideas—all of which tended to spread across national bounds, once proven effective.

In fact, England, which beat continental Europe to the industrial revolution, did so partly with tools taken from the Continent. Britain's pioneering steam engine drew on a Frenchman's earlier demonstration that steam could move a piston. And its intellectual-property laws weren't homegrown, either. Patent law had sprung up in Venice in 1474 and then spread across Europe, encouraging invention.

China lacked such neighborly inspiration. What's more, its relative isolation spared it from a dilemma that precisely foreshadows its current one: in Europe during the industrial revolution, information technology tightened the link between economic and political liberty. As the industrial revolution unfolded, the printing press not only hastened technical advance by publicizing new ideas; it also smoothed day-to-day commerce by spreading business news, shipping schedules, and the like. Keeping presses free enough to perform these services well while restricting the political use of the press was difficult at best. Indeed, England's especially free presses, and its greater respect for political rights, may well explain why it led Europe into the industrial revolution. In any event, England's combination of political and economic liberty became the paradigm for prosperity. Slowly and fitfully, this paradigm would spread across Europe. China, off in its own sparse neighborhood, could ignore the paradigm without getting clobbered by some neighbor that had embraced it.

But, as technology shrank the world, China's solitude couldn't last—a point made forcefully by Western gunships in the nineteenth century and made just as inescapably by commercial vessels today. China now feels competitive heat across continents and oceans. It must face the same logic the rest of the world faces: In the age of the Internet, even more than in the age of industry and print, granting enough economic liberty for cutting-edge prosperity while denying political liberty is a tall order.

And that's not all that has changed. Though China's ideographic script remains a burden—ever try to use a Chinese keyboard?—it doesn't multiply the costs of communication nearly the way it did during the Sung era. Besides, voice-recognition software, which is now approaching practicality, will soon let the Chinese publish Web pages and send e-mail with Western ease.

In short, two things that help explain China's distinctive past—its ideographic script and its geographic isolation from the modern world—are of vanishing relevance. And that is

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why Clinton is not crazy to expect a culture with a technological, economic, and political history so different from the West's to move toward the Western way.

Still, Europe's age of print offers one big caution: When an information technology strengthens the link between liberty and prosperity, rulers can spend a long time in denial, trying to have their cake and eat it, too. Even after England's liberal formula for economic success had proven itself, Napoleon was doing things like seizing the newspaper *Journal des débats* and renaming it *Le Journal de l'empire*. And, more recently, the Soviet Union showed that, for a while at least, you can stifle freedom and keep industry humming. That no such attempts to have it both ways have ultimately succeeded is reassuring, but that they've succeeded for years is not. Even assuming that membership in the WTO sends more information technology into China, its leaders could spend a long time trying to evade the moral of the story.

In fact, they probably will. After all, the free use of the Internet would not only threaten the Communist Party's preeminence but also stoke separatist sentiment in, for example, the Muslim province of Xinjiang. Unless you view the Chinese regime as much more selfless than the average authoritarian regime, you would expect it to react to the Internet as it's been reacting lately—in skittish and reactionary fashion.

This points to an odd feature of the rhetoric of hawkish opponents of engagement. Kagan and others have mocked pleas from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that we be patient—that we see change in China as "a movie, not a snapshot," that we not allow temporary backsliding on human rights to discourage us. Apparently, Kagan sarcastically writes, "it's one of those movies in which nothing happens for a very, very long time." Yet his own view of the Chinese leadership—as ruthlessly bent on self-preservation—implies that the movie *will* unfold, slowly. There may be something paradoxical about Clinton's suggesting, as he did last week, that China's recent oppression shows engagement is working, but he is, in a sense, right.

The core concern of Kagan—and of many other opponents of engagement these days—is international security. Kagan says that by "rewarding" China with permanent most-

Red and the Blue

FOR YEARS NOW, congressional trade wars have had a particular structure: isolationist Republicans and protectionist Democrats on one side, the free-trade establishments of both parties on the other. And, last year, the fight over granting China "permanent normal trading relations" (PNTR) status seemed to be following the familiar pattern. Anti-globalization Democrats were energized by the shutdown of the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle. Republican opposition to the war in Kosovo seemed to confirm the GOP's isolationist drift. Free traders feared the wings might be growing, but at least they thought they knew the terms of the fight. In fact, in recent months those terms have shifted dramatically. The crucial anti-PNTR argument is no longer about protectionism or isolationism; it's about national security. Last year, most observers thought the threat to free trade with China would come from rising nationalism. Today it comes from rising internationalism.

You can see the trend in both parties, but it's most significant in the GOP, because Republicans traditionally provide the largest bloc of free-trade votes. After the Gingrich takeover, Dick Armey-, Cato Institute-, *Wall Street Journal*-style libertarianism held many congressional Republicans in thrall. Spreading the magic of the market, at home and abroad, was the GOP watchword. Some worried that this market internationalism might lose ground to Buchanan-style isolationism. But instead it is losing ground to a "neo-Reaganism" that casts China in the role of the Soviet Union and says America needs to subordinate crass economic concerns and devote itself to keeping Beijing at bay. The intellectual and political leaders of this school—columnist and *Weekly Standard* contributor Robert Kagan, former Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer William Triplett, and former congressional aide Edward Timperlake—sometimes call themselves the "Blue Team," a term borrowed from the Chinese military. And they've succeeded—with some help from the authorities in Beijing—in making PNTR a debate less about America's trade deficit or even China's human rights abuses than about the growing regional power of the People's Republic.

Although he's officially undecided on PNTR, one of the Blue Team's strongest congressional allies is Christopher Cox, chairman of the House Policy Committee. Cox advocates abandoning America's long-held commitment to "strategic ambiguity," the policy by which the United States refuses to state specifically how it would respond to a Chinese attack on Taiwan. His Policy Committee, which is supposed to represent the official position of House Republicans, regularly rolls out briefs painting China as a danger to international stability and blasting the "Clinton-Gore appeasement policy." The committee even has its own think tank—the Congressional Policy Advisory Board—filled with aging luminaries from the Reagan and Bush administrations. The board's most recent policy statement on China recommends further military ties to Taiwan. But even though it is supposed to be an arm of the GOP leadership—and House GOP leaders Dennis Hastert, Dick Armey, and Tom DeLay back PNTR—the board has conspicuously failed to endorse permanent free trade with China. "The Beijing government is testing to see how far they can push before someone pushes back," warns Cox.

It's not just the Republicans who want to push back. Pennsylvania Democratic Representative John Murtha voted for GATT in 1994 and has consistently supported most-favored-nation (MFN) trading status for China. But he's a Vietnam veteran, the ranking Democrat on the National Security Subcommittee, and a foreign policy hawk. And last week he came out against PNTR strictly on national-security grounds, emphasizing his anger about China's chemical-weapon and missile proliferation and its "grossly irresponsible conduct" toward Taiwan. Now Murtha has joined with another Democrat, Taiwanese-born David Wu, to form a bipartisan group of representatives who may have previously supported MFN but are against PNTR partly because of China's actions abroad. They are gathering signatures for an anti-PNTR letter,

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favored-nation status after its recent threats to Taiwan, we'll only get more belligerence. This concern, by itself, would be easy to address. Congress, while passing Clinton's normal-trade-relations legislation, could pass another bill saying that if China attacks Taiwan, tariffs on Chinese goods will automatically rise to 100 percent, and the United States will stoically bear any sanctions the WTO might authorize in response. Assuming the passage of such a law weren't deemed legally incompatible with U.S. membership in the WTO, it would be a more effective deterrent than anything Kagan is proposing. (Authorizing the sale of a missile defense system to Taiwan would encourage China to strike preemptively, during the lengthy period before deployment.)

But engagement poses another, dicier international-security problem. It is one Kagan and other hawks can't acknowledge, because acknowledging it would involve admitting that the core logic behind engagement is sound. The problem is that the spread of information technology, by fanning dissidence and thus destabilizing China, could empower reactionary factions inclined to lash out at Taiwan—or inclined to drum up some other enemy in an attempt to congeal a China that the Internet was breaking apart.

I think it's a risk worth taking. China, barring a complete about-face, is headed for modernization, with or without full American involvement. The danger of moving so fast as to empower reactionaries is real, but the degree of danger is too murky and fluid for us to fine-tune. And should things go bad—should China be tempted to turn inward and lash outward—its greater involvement in the global economy will make it less likely to succumb to the temptation.

In the long run, history exhibits patterns. In the short run, it is unpredictable. Sometimes all you can do is bet on the long-run patterns and hope for the best. One pattern that stretches over the past millennium is that when China has state-of-the-art information technology and is engaged in the world, its people are better off, economically and politically, than when it is not. And, in the modern world, so are the countries to which China is inextricably linked, such as the United States. ■

and PNTR opponents say there are 30 former MFN supporters who might sign on. "The people who are undecided cite [Taiwan] as a prime reason for having misgivings about PNTR," says one top union lobbyist. "There are people who don't want to vote for PNTR and then have China attack Taiwan—that would look pretty bad."

China's recent actions have played right into those national-security fears. Just days after one of the highest-ranking U.S. delegations ever to visit China returned to the United States in late February, Beijing issued its now-infamous white paper on Taiwan. The 11,000-word document, which was opposed by China's trade ministry, threatened Taiwan with force and "drastic measures" if negotiations over reunification continued to stall—a break with China's previous position, which was that it would use force only if Taiwan sought independence or was occupied by a foreign power. The report also bashed the United States for selling arms and developing other military links to Taiwan. And China's rhetoric hasn't improved since then. The military's official newspaper recently editorialized that Beijing would "spare no effort in a blood-soaked battle" to win back Taiwan and announced a 13 percent increase in military spending. Having raised tensions with Taiwan and jeopardized PNTR in Congress, China then blamed the United States. "The United States bears unshakable responsibility for the tensions in the Taiwan Strait," the Chinese foreign minister said last week.

The threats to Taiwan are, of course, meant to influence the presidential elections there on March 18. The Chinese are terrified that the most independence-minded candidate, Chen Shui-Bian, could win. But, while the rhetoric may keep some Taiwanese from voting for Chen, it has also pushed some U.S. congressmen into the "no" column on PNTR. Lobbyists on both sides of the issue are targeting 130 members of Congress with mixed voting records on previous trade deals and on MFN—folks like Murtha. In a break with past strategy, union officials are this year playing down labor, environmental, and human rights violations and stressing that China's recent aggressiveness shouldn't be rewarded. Persecuted Christians and trade deficits are out; cold war language is in. "I think this is a total reversal of George Kennan's philosophy about communism and his policy of containment," says Bill Klinefelter, legislative and political director for the United Steelworkers, a man you'd think would be more concerned about job losses than foreign policy threats. "What we seem to be doing here is placating and appeasing the Communist hierarchy with these agreements to little or no effect."

Part of the reason for the shift is necessity. America's booming economy and record-low unemployment make the lost-jobs case much harder to argue for than it was in the early '90s, when the country was in recession, or even the mid-'90s, when downsizing was the rage. What's more, letting China into the WTO will almost certainly help the U.S. economy. How can a lobbyist for the United Auto Workers argue that reducing Chinese tariffs on American automobiles from 80 percent to 25 percent—as the Clinton deal stipulates—will kill U.S. jobs? And China's human rights and environmental situation, while as bad as ever, is not bad enough to change minds. "People already knew about the workers' rights, the environmental concerns," says one union official. "The new twist is this national-security issue."

For now, pro-labor Democrats seem happy to embrace the anti-Communist arguments of their new allies on the right. But there is a danger for the unions in this alliance. Ultimately, the hawks are concerned not with trade but with security. They could be bought off, for example, by passage of the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, which would strengthen military ties to Taiwan. The unions, their new containment rhetoric aside, don't even have a position on the act. "We haven't examined that fully," says Klinefelter. Some Republican holdouts say they might support PNTR for China as part of a compromise that addresses their concerns about Taiwan. And, of course, they have little interest in labor's concerns about the effects of PNTR on workers. If the hawks cut a deal on Taiwan that helps pass PNTR, the unions will have fallen prey to a bait and switch. And it will be they, not the neo-Reaganites, who will truly warrant the moniker "Blue Team."

RYAN LIZZA

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Odd Couples

In 1942 the marvelous Ernst Lubitsch made a mistake. A master of sophisticated comedy—and of comic sophistication—he dared, in that dark year, to make *To Be Or Not To Be*, a comedy about a Warsaw theater company and its twitting of the occupying Germans. That wasn't the mistake: the screenplay was fine. Lubitsch made a casting error. The leading actor of that Warsaw troupe, known for his Hamlet, which indeed we see a bit of, was played by Jack Benny. Millions of Americans adored Benny, a vaudeville and radio comic, for his drawl, his pauses, his quizzical inflections, his petty angers, but these were here the sole techniques of the character that he was playing, a great theater star, a tragedian who off-stage was a sort of Molnar character. But owing to Benny's popularity, Lubitsch put this limited vaudevillian in the role.

Benny was unbelievable as a great actor and was clumsy as an off-stage salon gentleman. And there in Hollywood all the while was Fredric March, handsome, dazzlingly gifted, who could have and should have played Hamlet, and who was already celebrated for comic acting, not for a skimpy repertoire of tricks. March was ignored; and a film that might have been a comic masterpiece became ... a film that might have been a comic masterpiece.

Though **What Planet Are You From?** (Columbia) could never have been anything like a masterpiece, it could have been a high-wire circus act, kept spinning by a skillful star performance. But once again a leading role was mortgaged to popularity. It is played by a grown-up Pillsbury boy with a doughy face and a coarse grip on comic acting. Like Benny, or as Benny became, he is a television star, named Garry Shandling. His repertory of tricks is even smaller than Benny's, and duller.

Shandling apparently had a lien on the proceedings. He and Michael Leeson wrote the original story, and then those two plus Ed Solomon and Peter Toland wrote the screenplay. Obviously all this concocting aimed to provide a vehicle for Shandling; but it is very much to the point of the picture's sags to note that a true comedian—like Kevin Kline—could have made it a romp.

It is a science-fiction farce. The leader of a planet far away wants to colonize the earth and means to do it by sending someone to impregnate Earth women. The males of this distant planet, insofar as they are males, have been trained with laser-created Earth women, and the one who is selected for the mission is given an Earth name, Harold Anderson, and a penis, which the others on that planet do not have. Harold is aware that, in intimate situations with women, the penis will react and that, because it is an attachment, it will hum.

By turbulent means, he is put aboard an Arizona West airliner, lands in Los Angeles fully equipped with papers and bio, and begins work in a bank job that awaits him. Not yet quite svelte, he proposes sex bluntly to every nubile female he encounters, with no results, but finally he meets Susan, played by Annette Bening. She is a fortyish woman who has had an alcoholic, promiscuous life, and in time she responds to Harold's intensity. (Their relationship is a cartoon version of the *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* mantra. Susan is emotional and complex, Harold is more sexually single-minded.)

The rest of the story leads of course to difficulties, to discoveries, to partings and suspense. At last pregnancy occurs, and so does the investigation by a Federal aviation official, alerted through the Arizona West turbulence. (The official is played by John Goodman, now so obese that, when he hustles, we feel that a cardiologist is waiting just off camera.) This is one more story with so many plot problems that much of its suspense is about how the writers will tie it all up. They do, no more credibly than the story deserves. We accept it because the film has to be finished and this is as good a way as any to let us get out and go home.

Yet the picture is funnier than Shandling and its other defects. The basic idea, in its Aristophanic phallic center, is amusing: a male who is newly penis-endowed looking with persistent innocence for a partner. Some of the scenes are snappy burlesque bits, and some of the dialogue is sharp. When Harold is at a bar trying to pick up a really hot but cool number, she hears the hum and asks what that noise is. He tells her that his penis hums. She asks dryly, "Because it forgot the words?"

That line and other comparable cracks highlight a cultural fact. Before radio and television, and even for some time afterwards, Broadway and its derivatives would have produced this comedy, and actors would have been saying those lines eight times a week for years. The more years the better. Now the actors have to do them only once. No wonder there are no more Neil Simons coming along on Broadway. Why bother with a local deployment of trivial wisecracks with the hope to be doing them in that same place for years, and in a limited number of other places for more years, when a film can take care of them at one swoop and scatter them to the globe?

Of course this might be true of weighty theater pieces, too, but this one-time-only process seems more sensible with gags.

Mike Nichols directed—his latest film work since his own excellent performance in Wallace Shawn's *The Designated Mourner*. Nichols is justly famous for his soufflé directing touch, beginning with *Barefoot in the Park* (by Neil Simon!), and he keeps this picture as bubbly as possible, considering that Shandling is on hand. And foot. Nichols lapses into a few banal touches like the spurting fountains outside the Harold-Susan bridal chamber, but maybe that's parody. Bening gives the film's best performance, almost too close to verity for this farce, but, as she has shown in *American Beauty* and elsewhere, she is a talent it will be lovely to reckon with.

The English actor Rupert Everett is shaping an unusual career, making a specialty of gay roles. Among the most recent was *My Best Friend's Wedding*, and here he is now in **The Next Best Thing** (Paramount). In recent years, leading actors have occasionally played gays and lesbians (Richard Burton and Rex Harrison played a gay pair in *Staircase* as long ago as 1969), and some supporting actors have specialized in swishy men almost from the beginnings of film. But Everett, competent and attractive and clearly popular, is blazing a star trail of gayness. (Ellen DeGeneres is an open lesbian, but I don't know how many lesbian roles she has played.)

Everett's career choice is a cultural landmark, and is the only point of interest in his new film. He plays opposite Madonna, a singer who would like to be an actress. Possibly. May we all live that long. The

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screenplay by Thomas Ropelewski is built on one of those brainstorms that occasionally hit script-carpenters and always impress producers. In Los Angeles (again) Madonna and Everett are great friends. Her boyfriend ditches her, and disconsolate, she asks her gay chum Everett to spend the night with her, just as a pal. He consoles her more than he remembers, and in time she has a baby. She and he can't marry, but they live together as parents of the boy, whom both of them adore.

That's enough of the plot. I add only that the boyfriend who ditched Madonna at the start is subsequently involved. The whole script is so stitched with nervous fingers that any human relevance it might have had is hobbled. The director is another Englishman, John Schlesinger, now 74, whose mixed career has included such memorable work as *A Kind Of Loving* and *Midnight Cowboy* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, and such differently unforgettable items as *Honky Tonk Freeway* and *Pacific Heights* and *The Falcon and the Snowman*.

Schlesinger promised well when he began, but all he has really managed to do is to keep working—which was nice for him but, on balance, not much for us, especially since he has never developed a recognizable style. ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

Requiem

On a cold day in February, the Kennedy School of Government played host to an event commemorating the 35th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts. It was open to serious question whether the proceedings were a celebration or a wake. Played before an overflow crowd of four hundred students and faculty, and a scattering of press, the evening was a theatrical event in the guise of a panel discussion, so it was appropriately moderated by Frank Rich, the former drama critic of *The New York Times*. Starring in the role of keynote speaker was the current chairman of that beleaguered agency, the genial, silver-haired Bill Ivey, former president of the Country Music Foundation. The featured players on the platform were the four surviving former chairpersons—Jane Alexander, John Frohnmayer, Frank Hodsell, and Livingston Biddle—appearing together in public for the first time. Representing five different political administrations stretching over twenty-five years, each of these battle-scarred administrators, with the exception of Alexander, were dressed in what appeared to be identical dark suits. Arrayed against the concrete wall of the Forum auditorium in a neat row, they looked to my increasingly glazed eyes like undertaker crows or attendant buzzards perched upon a telephone line.

The event was co-sponsored by the Office for the Arts, a mini-NEA at Harvard that, among other things, disburses small grants to artistic undergraduates. Considering the NEA's woefully declining appropriation, now fallen to $99 million from a high of $175 million in 1992, the two funding agencies were showing more in common than a mutual desire to encourage creative expression—namely a budget that represented a laughably tiny percentage of the parent holdings. Had federal funding become so small and restrictive as to now be irrelevant to the expectations of artistic institutions? That uncomfortable issue was never raised. Instead, Harvard's president Neil Rudenstine welcomed the participants with a more troubling question: "Are the arts and creativity central to American civilization?"

By now, the answer to this question is too depressing to repeat, which may be why nobody bothered to address it. In order to remind us what the NEA stood for, Jessye Norman came on to sing a couple of spirituals. She was just about the only practicing artist in the hall, if you don't count Jane Alexander or Robert Pinsky, both there in an official capacity. After this brief display, the panelists began to hold forth on the importance of the arts to the human condition, to the human spirit, to the survival of civilization, to the quality of life on this planet, perhaps to the future of the galaxy, and so on. Inspirational language of this kind is the lingua franca of arts administrators. I am often forced to use such boilerplate myself. It helps us to avoid defining exactly what we mean by the arts.

Certainly, the NEA in recent years has consistently failed to formulate a clear definition of the arts, or even to articulate a coherent policy for the arts. In the earliest days of the agency, under the chairmanships of Roger Stevens and Nancy Hanks, it was evident from their support of serious artists and artistic institutions that the original mission of the NEA was to stimulate high culture. Under the regimes that followed, and under growing pressure from rightwing legislators and leftwing levelers, the NEA was to grow increasingly politicized, populist, and pop-oriented.

Ivey's skillful keynote address revealed how far advanced that process has become. Acknowledging that the agency was born out of Cold War necessity—namely, the need to vanquish the Soviets in every area, including education and the arts—Ivey betrayed through his choice of imagery a belief that culture was still important mainly as an extension of the political process. Reaching for a metaphor to describe the creative function, he said that "art can be the centerpiece of our international diplomacy" and that culture can function as the "currency of border exchange." This was Ivey's subtle way of revealing his predilection for political utility and cultural diversity. Presumably sitting on this cultural border like Emma Goldman's "wretched refuse" were a variety of ethnic forms waiting to cross over, many hungry workers and eager citizens ready to be employed as border ambassadors.

Ivey went on to say that "our sense of what constitutes the arts is artificially narrow," admonishing us against making any "categorical judgments" that would favor "art with a capital 'A'." He seemed to prefer the word "multiculturalism" with a small "m," since that broad category relieved us of the necessity of making judgments of quality (with a capital "Q"). Rather than continue its traditional support for non-profit activities, Ivey now wanted the agency to include blues, jazz, country music, movies, musical theater, and TV—all on a budget of $99 million, of which only forty percent went to what he called "creativity." At no time did he suggest how the NEA might discriminate

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among these varieties of popular culture, some of them (jazz and blues) qualified art forms in need of financial support, others profitable enterprises perfectly capable of supporting themselves. He was more interested in the question: "How does my world engage the citizens of Wal-Mart and the shoppers at K-Mart?"

Jane Alexander, introduced by Rich as someone whose hair had literally turned white from her struggles with a recalcitrant Congress, conceded that "the Endowment has been a populist organization for a long time now." Rather than debate that point, she preferred to comment on the political climate, saying ruefully, "We need better minds in government." And no wonder. Chairwoman under Clinton, she was hung out to dry by a president whose priorities never matched his rhetoric about the arts. Reagan's appointment, Frank Hodsell, now living in Arizona as a born-again Christian, was bubbling with Republican cheer and market savvy: for him, the arts were best regarded as "a strategic investment." Rather than lament the precipitous decline in funding, Hodsell considered it a great accomplishment that the Endowment had survived at all. He too disapproved of art with a capital "A"—"the arts," he magnanimously added, "are everything"—while warning us not to treat the NEA as a weapon against Hollywood and popular culture.

The booklet circulated by the NEA to commemorate its thirty-five years certainly confirmed Hodsell's and Ivey's distrust of capital "A" art. Contrasted with photographs, from the early years, of theater, dance, and opera companies, symphony orchestras, and jazzmobiles, were those from later years featuring ceramics manufacturing, adobe church preservation, Ghana weaving, basket weaving, lacemaking, raven and eagle drumming, Native American Lumber drumbeating, and Santos working (don't ask me).

Livingston Biddle, Carter's appointment and the first populist chairman to make handicrafts equal in importance to the arts at the Endowment, was perhaps the most politically focused of all the participants. He began by begging a round of applause for such friendly Washington stalwarts as Frank Brademas, Claiborne Pell, and Leonard Garment, before launching into a long story about the time he took Gregory Peck to meet a congressman opposed to arts funding. The point, finally revealed after a lot of pointless detail, was that two signatures were exchanged—Peck's in the congressman's daughter's autograph book, the congressman's on the appropriations bill. Was this meant to be some kind of chapbook lesson about the myth and magic of the movies?

It took John Frohnmayer, the Bush-appointed chairman who took all the heat during the Serrano and Mapplethorpe controversies, to remind the panelists that the original mandate of the NEA was to function as a "counter-market" force in a commercial society. In other words, the NEA was created to support and to encourage those worthy works of art often ignored by "the citizens of Wal-Mart and the shoppers at K-Mart." A man who had been converted into a committed civil libertarian by his harrowing years in Washington (Frohnmayer was fired by the Bush administration for refusing to endorse content restrictions), he was in a position to know that "a person who has not been offended by art is not likely to be affected by bookburning." Frohnmayer was the only one in the room willing to admit that "what we have done at the Arts Endowment has been 99.9 percent safe."

Ivey, who applauded the Supreme Court ruling on content restrictions, argued, along with Hodsell, that the head of the NEA is a "keeper of the public trust," and therefore obliged to make choices regarding political and sexual content. For all the talk of the human spirit, it had become perfectly clear that very few of these functionaries were willing to look squarely into the occasionally ugly face of art.

Rich occasionally tried to get the panel to address the unresolved issues, with little success. He noted how often the case for arts funding today had to be made on utilitarian grounds such as creating employment, increasing tourism, or raising SAT scores. And he asked how the NEA should behave in a world where popular culture was being increasingly controlled and manipulated by such huge conglomerates as Disney, Livent (now SFX), and AOL–TimeWarner.

More relevant was the fate of high culture in such a world, but the unspoken dirty secret of this conference was how money—or the absence of money—was contaminating the arts. With the collapse of the NEA as a significant player because of its reduced funding and confused priorities, many of the cultural institutions that it used to support have had to look elsewhere for funding. This condition has led directly to such scandals as the Brooklyn Museum of Art's "Sensation" exhibit, with its subsequent fallout. It was easy enough to defend the museum against charges of obscenity coming from the office of Mayor Giuliani. Many of us did, in kneejerk fashion, when we first got wind of the controversy. What was much more difficult to swallow were the subsequent charges of conflict of interest involving Charles Saatchi, Christie's, and the way the exhibit was used to further private financial gain. (This controversy also exposed the fact that many museums routinely ask for sales fees on paintings loaned by collectors and later sold.)

Saatchi's personal involvement in the choice of paintings in this exhibit, not to mention the way they were hung and marketed, was a striking indication of the way the world of money dictates to, and corrupts, the world of art. In Saatchi's case, however, publicity may have played an equal part. When I visited an exhibit of "Neurotic Art 2" at Saatchi's London gallery, every single headline regarding the scandal was proudly plastered over the walls of the museum. It will no doubt be marketed some day as a free-standing exhibit called "Sensational Me."

A similar thing is now happening in the nonprofit theater world. Indeed, when it comes to debauching non-profit institutions, the commercial producer Cameron Mackintosh makes the private collector Charles Saatchi look like a piker. First, his production of *Les Mis* was premiered by the government-subsidized Royal Shakespeare Company directed by Trevor Nunn, who had also directed *Cats* there—after which both productions moved to Broadway. Then the Cameron Mackintosh production of *Carousel* opened at the government-subsidized Royal National Theatre, directed by its then-artistic director Richard Eyre, before moving to the nonprofit Vivian Beaumont Theater. And now the nonprofit Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, an institution traditionally devoted to Shakespeare and the classics, has mounted a Cameron Mackintosh musical (*The Return of Martin Guerre*) as part of its subscription season. That musical then moved to the nonprofit Kennedy Center in Washington, where it met such sour reviews that its New York premiere at the non-profit Vivian Beaumont (also responsible for co-producing the musical *Parade*, with Livent) had to be postponed.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Virtually every major theater in America is in the throes of preparing a show designed to move to Broadway, always with the priming of "enhancement money" from commercial interests, and sometimes with no artistic oversight whatsoever. Clearly, these theaters are now trying to make money the old-fashioned way (by earning it), and one could make the case that there is much more dignity in forming alliances with commercial producers than in trying to persuade federal, state, and private donors that you are performing enough community services or culturally diverse work to warrant their support. Yet there was a time not long ago when the NEA used routinely to monitor this sort of activity, withholding or reducing grants to nonprofit theater companies that were

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selling their birthright to the commercial stage.

Now no one is watching, and anyway there is not enough financial leverage to make a difference. The high arts have become an endangered species in this country, being picked off by a variety of sharpshooters, including commercial producers, populists, politicians, multi-culturalists, middlebrow critics and, not least of all, the foundations. At the event celebrating thirty-five years of the NEA, I imagined that I saw the heads of many of those extinct animals mounted on the walls, under a plaque designated "Art with a capital 'A.'" ■

The Palpable Past-Intimate

By JAMES WOOD

In America by Susan Sontag

(Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 387 pp., $26)

IS IT STILL possible to write the historical novel? There would seem to be powerful arguments, and powerful modern instances, against it. First, it is the least innocent of forms in an all-too-knowing age; one might say, paradoxically, that at this late stage it represents the novel at its most complacently alienated from itself. This has primarily to do with the pace of historical change in the last century. It is true that *War and Peace* is an historical novel, but rather as *The Prelude* is an historical poem. Tolstoy felt confident about reaching back sixty or so years from his age to the Napoleonic wars, because he was so sure that nothing essential had changed that he could proceed to write what was, in effect, a contemporary novel.

But there is now a large gulf between, say, the beginning of this century and the beginning of the last, and into this breach may run our quivering self-consciousness. For nowadays we know how acute our historical separateness is, and it is this knowledge that is so dangerous to the unthinking freedom of fiction. It is this knowledge that lends a certain desperate quality to the detail that writers of historical fiction choose to mention. Of course, they do not really choose their detail; it chooses them. If a writer is painting London or New York in 1900, we must be told about coachmen and dandies with canes, or 1900 will not have been evoked. And the characters in historical fiction—especially the minor characters—are not free either, for they are continually being forced to say things like, "Have you seen *The Tramp* yet?", just so that we know that it is 1915. Such characters can end up sounding like the paradoxical mathematician described by Plato, who, when counting numbers that he must already know, "sets out to learn from himself anew something he must already be familiar with."

This is one reason why the historical novel may nowadays be merely science-fiction facing backwards, with the same crudities of detail. Without the ability to move freely, detail is converted from the accidental into the determined, and the book may become stagy, and essentially unliterary. It may also become essentially unhistorical, for if a great deal of time is being wasted on the confirmation of the past, then history is being confirmed in its crudest particulars, rather than challenged or even explored. All these large alienations drive the historical novel away from what Henry James, in the letter to Sarah Orne Jewett in which he condemned the historical novel, called "the palpable present-intimate."

Alessandro Manzoni, who wrote the historical novel *The Betrothed* in 1827, argued against the historical novel, surprisingly enough, in his essay *On The Historical Novel.* Always a great believer in the science of historical inquiry, Manzoni felt that the historical novel could not succeed because it mixed the literary (what he called "the verisimilar") with actual, historical fact (what he called "positive truth"). He argued that this blending of history and invention mangled both modes of writing, and robbed the historical novel of any purity of purpose: "the historical novel is a work in which the necessary turns out to be impossible . . . it

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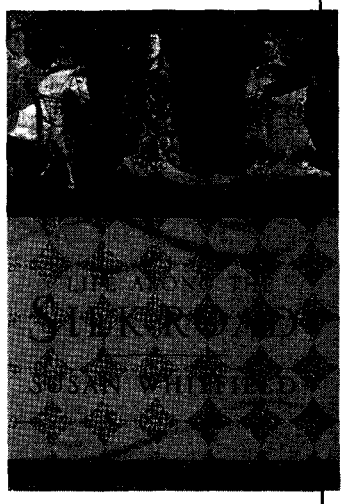

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does not have a logical purpose of its own."

And yet Manzoni wrote a great historical novel. He reconciled what he saw as the lumpy disjunction of the historical and the invented by combining standard novelistic (or invented) narration with historically aware essayism—by refusing to leave alone his own fictional detail, but often pointing readers towards its actual historical status. In other words, he was self-conscious about his self-consciousness. This was a liberty for Manzoni, but it may be the only possible way to write historical fiction now. It is the method that Susan Sontag adopts in her historical novel *In America*, and alongside other techniques and contexts, it more than saves her novel from the confident awkwardness of the genre.

Sontag's novel tells the story of a group of educated and adventurous Poles, led by a great actress already famous in her homeland, who leave Poland for America in the 1870s, and settle briefly in a rural commune in Anaheim, California. It is loosely based on the true story of the Polish actress Helena Modrzejewska, who emigrated to America in 1876, along with her husband and son, and with the young writer Henryk Sienkiewicz. In America, after a short time in California, Helena reinvented herself as an American actress, with the name Helena Modjeska.

Immediately Sontag inserts herself into the foreground of the novel, as she did in her last historical fiction, *The Volcano Lover*. The book's first chapter, which is fanciful but oddly moving, gathers the characters in a hotel dining-room in a town in Poland, and Sontag—so the conceit goes—wanders unnoticed around the room, deciding what her characters will do and what names they should have, and generally, as she finely puts it, "scattering seeds of prediction." The chapter is an introductory confession; indeed, it is startlingly confessional. Referring to her early marriage to a well-known scholar, Sontag writes that at the age of seventeen she read *Middlemarch* and cried, because she realized that she was Dorothea Brooke and that she had married Casaubon. She tells us that she has perhaps been drawn to write about Poland because all four of her grandparents came from that country; and before we can resist the sentimentality of this thought, she undermines it herself by admitting that she had tried to describe a hotel room in Sarajevo at the same historical moment, and failed.

So we are reading an historical fiction, and we are to be reminded periodically of this throughout the book. This kind of self-reflexiveness can come to seem in weaker books like a repetitive and doomed attempt at self-cleansing—like someone washing her hands again and again—but after the first chapter it is only delicately pressed on. (We hear no more from Sontag, as such.) Yet it is intellectually important, for it suspends the characters in a fluid of modernity (or postmodernity), and releases them from the category of historical idiocy. We know that they know they are being watched by a contemporary writer; but inside this careful panopticon they live and breathe fully as free fictional characters.

Susan Sontag by David Schorr for The New Republic

In fact, the heroine of the novel, the actress Maryna Załęzowska, is used to being watched, and used to watching herself. Histrionic, imperious, willful, and demanding, she spends her life in a crowd of mirrors; her loving entourage, which includes her loyal husband Bogdan and her ardent admirer and subsequent lover Ryszard (he is based on Sienkiewicz), reflect her glory back to her. Maryna is a powerful creation, alive, not exactly likeable but fizzy with her own essence. She has more than a hint in her of Irina Arkadin, Chekhov's impossible actress in *The Seagull*.

Sontag shrewdly uses the stageyness of the world, this actress's world—we travel with Maryna on her triumphant American tour—further to complicate the certainties of the historical novel. For the book is suffused with a certain plush, melodramatic stageyness of its own, half-parody and half-innocence; it is always proposing *performance*. Its world is being watched, but it is also watching itself, and watching us, too. And this is done in a manner that seems both self-conscious and genuinely unconscious on Sontag's part. One is reminded of her unfashionable belief in the theater, which is similarly innocent and now necessarily also a self-consciousness. The result is that the inevitable artificiality of historical detail is coated in a certain buoyant irony, which breaks into true creative gaiety.

In general, it is striking how little historical detail seems to clog the surface of this novel; it has been smoothed into underground discretion. The book is not a disquisition on the America of the 1870s. That is not to say that Sontag does not occasionally bully her data into historical confession. There is a somewhat crude moment, for instance, when Ryszard is buttonholed by a man who seems to want to talk about someone he calls "Tockveel," and "Tockveel's" visit to America fifty years before. It is one of those encounters that happens only in novels. And later in the book the reader becomes restless when Sontag writes that the Poles were nostalgic for Polish music: "they had longed for the sound of Polish composers, a song by Kurpiński, a waltz by Ogiński..." The Poles, being Polish, would not have had to name these famil-

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iar composers to themselves (shades of Plato's mathematician); and since the names mean little to us non-Poles, it is simply a matter of homework being presented for reward by the author.

AT SUCH MOMENTS, the joists of the enterprise of the historical novel are exposed. This leads to a further suspicion of the form as currently practiced, which is that historical fiction may get a borrowed gravity from its subject, a gravity for which fiction set in its own time must more dirtily labor. Hasn't Sontag avoided some of the messy chanciness of fiction by choosing to write about educated Poles in the 1870s? A certain language and grammar of manners—a set of conventions that are themselves derived from nineteenth-century fiction—is already in place, not to mention the furniture and the couture of the period (lorgnettes, hats, silks, and so on). These things come already solemnized by literature, whereas the novelist who wants to write about modern Brooklyn or modern Knightsbridge must strive for his or her own solemnity.

To be fair, Sontag uses the story of this emigration precisely to throw a nineteenth-century (or "European") gravity into the unclaimed space of an America that does not recognize these conventions. And Sontag is very subtle in the way she approaches historical detail, properly treating it as fictive detail. The description of the Atlantic crossing made by Ryszard and a friend is extremely good. It includes a painful scene in which Ryszard, seeking journalistic information, wanders below decks into steerage, where he encounters an Irishman who is pimping for his six captive "nieces." Ryszard is cajoled into having lukewarm sex with one of the girls, who is barely fifteen, but he cannot do it, and only pretends to go through the motions behind a dirty curtain, so that the "uncle" will not beat his "niece" afterwards for rejecting the gentleman visitor.

Once in America, Maryna takes her little son Piotr to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. There she marvels at the new American inventions, and writes to an old friend in Poland of what she has seen. But Sontag does not overplay her hand here. Maryna is especially taken with a typewriter, which she describes as "a porcupine-like machine for stamping inked letters on blank paper." And she is enthusiastic about the telephone, which she imagines will one day be in every household. But since she cannot imagine the television, she thinks that the telephone will be a kind of television, and expresses educated caution: "And what a boon to humanity that will be, when, by means of this device, anyone can have an Italian opera, a play of Shakespeare, a debate in the Congress, a sermon by their favorite preacher laid on like gas in one's own house . . . Still, I worry about the consequences of this invention, human laziness being what it is, for nothing can replace the experience of entering a temple of dramatic art. . ." This is just the right pressure of self-conscious irony; we enjoy the fatalism of our televisual retrospect, and subtly correct Maryna's fatalism in our minds. Delicacy is all, here; for anything heavier would fail.

Eventually, after several weeks on the east coast, the group find their separate ways to California, and it is California that prompts some of Sontag's finest writing. Sontag grew up in California, and this novel may be seen as almost invisibly watermarked by her own nostalgia for that early landscape. "Even now . . . it thrills me to write CALIFORNIA," writes Maryna to her old friend, and one feels this to be Sontag's sentiment, also. A kind of ecstasy takes over her prose when she writes of the California desert, and she is both lyrical and precise:

> Hardly anything is near anything here: those slouching braided sentinels, the yucca trees, and bouquets of drooping spears, the agaves, and the squat clusters of prickly pears, all so widely spaced, so unresembling—and nothing had to do with anything else ... The purity of the vista, its uncompromising bleakness, seemed first like a menace, then an excitement, then a numbing, then a different arousal. Their real initiation into the seductive nihilism of the desert had begun. The soundless, odorless, monochrome landscape, so drastically untenanted, had the same effect on everyone: an intoxicating impression of aloneness...

At first, the quixotic European attempt at frontier farming seems to prosper. Maryna, though famous in Europe, is a mere immigrant in California, and involved, like the rest of her family and friends, with the graft of subsistence. She loves it, and loves America, if complicatedly, feeling that "the sudden drop in the volume of meanings in the new life worked on her like a thinning out of oxygen." But schism soon threatens, as if in a secular mimicry of religious fracture: two of their number are lured away to a rival commune, and another couple returns to Poland after the unhappy wife tries to kill herself. Those left are not especially good farmers; in a nice detail, Sontag writes that none of the women were very good at milking, for "they felt they were torturing the cows."

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Meanwhile Maryna, Bogdan, and Ryszard, who constitute the novel's controlling trio, are becoming restless. Bogdan, a faithful husband but a repressed homosexual, is attracted by novel American flesh, and confides secret desires to his tense diary. Ryszard, who is in love with Maryna, veers between elation and depression. On the one hand, "even if my life ended now, he said to himself, I would still think, My God, what a journey I have made." On the other hand, he feels that farming ill becomes his heroine, and that to extract the most from America one must stay on the move, as the hunter does.

Eventually Maryna decides to return to the stage—in America. Thus begins the last third of the book, an intensely imagined, superbly Dreiserian account of Maryna's lavish American victory. What may surprise some readers of Sontag's criticism is how easily she subjugates her intelligence, and yields to the fairy-tale textures of this episode. An initially skeptical theater manager, Angus Barton of the California Theatre in San Francisco, is won over, and soon Maryna—now retitled Marina Zalenska, because a Russian name sounds more impressive to the American public than a Polish one—is playing various melodramatic hits of the day, such as *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and *East Lynne* (which she disdainfully calls *Beast Lynne*).

As her fame grows, Maryna is given a private train to travel in, and crosses America. Some of Sontag's detail may have been taken from the historical record; but most of it must have been invented, and it has the high zest of invention on it like a sheen. In Jacksonville, a man presents her with two lime-green baby alligators, and her manager immediately converts the place of donation to New Orleans, because it sounds more glamorous. In Fort Wayne, an obese man wearing a yellow wig gives her a dog. He has already "pressed on her a bronze statuette of Hiawatha, the collected speeches of Ulysses S. Grant, and a music box, set on a nearby table and repeatedly wound up to unwind 'Carnival in Venice.'" In a curiously affecting scene, one admirer writes her a poem after her performance; and the last couplet, "Keep Polish memories in your heart alone,/America now claims you for her own," makes her weep. Soaps and scents named after her are being sold. Her only rival is Sarah Bernhardt.

The novel ends where, in a sense, it began, with Maryna occupying the only home she knows, the only one she is unnostalgic about: the theater. The book shuttles between homelessnesses. Being Polish, these men and women were already nostalgic for their country even while living in it. Maryna suspects that they are now suffering not only from nostalgia, but also from "a new illness, the inability to become attached to anything." In a way, the novel combines old nostalgia and new homelessness; these are the epochs that it moves between, for one might say that these characters are nostalgic for what they cannot be attached to anyway. And this means that they are out of place in America, too, because the America that Sontag portrays is a country of brutal, adhesive immigration. Yet these educated, upper-class, artistic Poles are emigrants rather than immigrants, and thus somehow both lost and found in America. And so Ryszard and Maryna exist most fully in their respective arts, the novel and the theater, and America becomes both a novel and a theater—for them, and, designedly, for the reader of this book.

For Sontag's other area of intellectual exploration is that of theatrical illusion. Here she braves didacticism, even unoriginality. After all, there is not much new to say about masks and the diabolical flexibility of the actor. Yet Sontag novelistically grounds her discussion in the concrete, and in the arrogantly anxious bosom of her heroine. Maryna is an intensely nineteenth-century creation, after all. Though she has played Schiller and Shakespeare, her most popular roles are watery melodramas, in which the very air of the theater is dropleted with the audience's cheap tears, and at the end of which the adulterous heroine must make sacrificial expiration.

Maryna is expert at these dying falls, practically a mortician of the melodramatic. As such, she is a luridly expressive actress, accustomed to the raucous support of her adoring Polish audiences. She is torn between a cold professionalism, in which, in the classic theatrical way, she is simply a soul for hire, ready to inhabit any emotion; and a Romantic authenticity, in which she exhaustingly undergoes the same emotions that she plays on stage. She argues, early in the novel, that acting ought to be about "*not* feeling," and longs to be more restrained in her playing. Yet her heart vibrates with the language of Shakespeare, and it is clear that, in an equally classic theatrical manner, she has become her roles.

The novel wisely does not seek to adjudicate between these rival approaches, but lets them lie complicatedly in the same woman. Is the theater, then, an art of easy falsity, or is it a difficult, self-expressive form, worthy of taking its place with the

Look Around

Sometimes I wonder about the power of invention.
If a look can replace the vigor I'm missing.
The woman I'm watching does not notice me.
Monday she brings petals with their stalks to her window.
Friday she removes them dried from the sill.
Her weekends are spent flowerless yet apart.
This is her summer habit and one I've come to own,
if not to love, for the habits I love are my own.
One manner of heartbreak is more abstract
than one manner of lust; this inequality
will expand to embrace what it will.
I once thought she smiled at me as I typed.
I returned the smile into the darkness
but I refuse to say *the darkness smiled back.*
The darkness was not even that dark.
The light from my computer screen at times
distracts me from my windowside vigil.
The window is a marshal of sainthood.
The window knows its job, and does it.
I have no job but to watch, and this I do
daily, and with the joy resignation brings.
Sometimes I wonder about the loss this entails.
Sometimes I wonder if my vision opens
only for windows, how I will navigate my life
in a cell. If a harbinger of spring is really desire
or only the private awareness of what
the woman I'm watching decides is her hell.
I have seen no demons in her apartment.
No demons have entered or left during my vigil.
But a demon arriving before I began
could be there still, awander in the rooms
and wanting to ask about the flowers but afraid
to ask would risk a warmth. Across the street
my apartment is cold despite the air.
Her flowers would never survive here.
But then, they will not survive anywhere.

Brian Henry

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other mimetic arts, such as writing and painting? I take Sontag to be nudging us to such a question, and perhaps finally to be suggesting that of course the theater is both falsity and authenticity, for mimesis is never innocent.

Certainly, Maryna does not attempt to reconcile these attitudes, and we are grateful for it. In a striking scene, Sontag dramatizes what might have been presented essayistically: the inevitable corruption of mimesis. Maryna, surrounded by her American actors, begins to speak, lyrically and expressively, some words of Polish. They are perhaps a hymn or a recitation, perhaps a poem. She finishes, and her colleagues express their delight. Then Maryna tells them that she has simply been reciting the Polish alphabet. She has been acting meaningless letters, and has almost brought her audience to tears.

This, presumably, is what Horace meant when he asked, rhetorically, "do good poems come by nature, or by art?" The same question might be asked of good novels, such as this one. One suspects that Sontag wants us to ask such a question, wants us to use the dilemma of theater's mimesis as a way of reflecting on the dilemma of the historical novel's relation to reality. For her book is both Romantically expressive and artfully sly; it is unconscious and self-conscious in equal measure. If this is the only possible way to write historical fiction in a postmodern time, then Sontag has magnificently managed to make it look like freedom rather than determination. It is certainly an achievement; but surely fiction has more primary duties than the recovery (even the enraptured recovery) of the past, and I wish that Sontag would release herself into the wide and even more unsettled straits of the palpable present-intimate. ■

The Rubble

By FRITZ STERN

Scenes from the End: The Last Days of World War II by Frank E. Manuel

(Steerforth Press, 135 pp., $20)

LITERATURE TELLS US that wars are fought under uncertain stars, that confusion is the order of the day. I felt tears in my eyes watching the famous scene in *Henry V*, in Kenneth Branagh's splendid film version, when the king, at Agincourt, bespattered with all the filth of battle, encounters the French emissary asking for leave to bury the dead, and Henry, uncertain, responds:

> I tell thee truly, herald
> I know not if the day be ours, or no;
> For yet a many of your horsemen peer,
> And gallop o'er the field.

Stendhal and Tolstoy made us understand the fog of war, and Fabrizio's meanderings at Waterloo are unique only in their literary form. John Keegan has recently written that "a cloud of unknowing" descended on the eve of battle in the Great War.

We have other modern witnesses. Historians have depicted their experiences in the Great War. Marc Bloch wrote his *souvenirs de guerre*, and R. H. Tawney recalled the thrill and the horror of an attack. A young American, William L. Langer, who volunteered in that war, at its end wrote an instant history of his company, and in 1966, after he had become the dean of American diplomatic historians, published an enlarged version of that history called *Gas and Flame in World War I*. What distinguishes these accounts is the immediacy of their experiences, and their first stirrings at historical interpretation.

Frank Manuel's rich, slim volume belongs to this genre. He came to World War II relatively late and relatively old. Born in 1910 into a Jewish neighborhood in Boston, he grew up speaking Yiddish, and learned French, received a doctorate from Harvard, and pursued a varied career in scholarship, teaching, journalism, and government service. Manuel was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943, and arrived in Paris the following December, just as the Germans launched their surprise attack in the Ardennes, at the Battle

FRITZ STERN's most recent book is *Einstein and His World* (Princeton University Press).

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of the Bulge. Paris was full of uncertainty and rumor. The Army had ignored intelligence reports warning of a German breakthrough. "We paid for our hubris in blood," Manuel ruefully observes. He served as an intelligence officer interrogating prisoners-of-war, and he went with the conquering Army all the way to Leipzig.

Upon his return from the war, Manuel had a successful career as an historian, teaching in the United States and abroad, specializing in the intellectual history of modern Europe. In 1983, he and his wife Fritzie Manuel produced the acclaimed *Utopian Thought in the Western World.* But only now, at the age of ninety, has he turned memories into a memoir, recovering notes that he wrote immediately after his return to the States on V-J day, and supplementing them with his wartime letters to his wife.

These documents refreshed his memory, but Manuel rightly calls the book "recollections of the spirit"; they are not exercises in exactitude. There is much dialogue in the book, conversations real and imagined, and they carry an air of authenticity. He seems to have recaptured the essence of his experiences, uncluttered by later historical knowledge. As he puts it, "Military historians have assembled a picture of the grand design, creating the myth of an official history, but fragments may be closer to the chaos of experience in war before it has been subjected to cleansing." And illustrative fragments they are.

Manuel writes crisply; a somewhat sardonic but never presumptuous tone marks the book, and it seems appropriate. He tries to understand the victors and the vanquished. He observes the defeated Germans (alternately called "the Boche" or "little Michel"). He encounters some of the many victims of Nazism's detested tyranny, the starved slave laborers, the remnants of European Jewry. He regrets "the summary judgment that poured out of me and the sentiments of superior virtue that besmirched all victors." In fact, his account is high-spirited and remarkably free of hatred. His sketches are more like Brueghel than Bosch.

Manuel's service began with the liberation of Colmar under the delegated command of French generals, "the conquered reconquering." At roughly the same time, American troops seized the bridge at Remagen, crossed the Rhine, and did not stop until Germany was totally defeated, sealed in unconditional surrender. By this time, Manuel writes, American troops rarely marched anymore: they motored across a country whose own troops and people were almost bereft of gasoline. "From Detroit to Nuremberg just one conveyor belt, and it whipped the Boche."

Manuel views the average German with a kind of contemptuous pity. Among the German soldiers there were many who wanted to be captured: "The little grenadier was forever plotting desertion, but desertion is more easily thought than done," especially when fanatical SS officers tried to continue the war to the end—and, if possible, as werewolves, beyond. (A recent study shows that Wehrmacht justice ordered a far higher rate of military executions than did American court martials.) Manuel records how Germans were "devouring" Germans. I was struck that the Nazi regime ended as it began: by killing Germans, with blind ferocity, if without the sadism that Nazis inflicted on Jews and others.

In the confusion of the war, Manuel was often catapulted into positions of unlikely authority. This American lieutenant with a Yiddish tinge to his German watched over imprisoned German generals and interrogated them. Also he had to bring order to a group of uprooted Europeans, to slave laborers suddenly freed and clamoring to go home. For them, too, the Germans had established a kind of hierarchy: French at the top, Poles and Russians at the most miserable bottom. He depicts a rabbi's burial of a Jew who had managed to survive only to be hit by an accidental American bomb. He recalls (or invents) the rabbi's words: "Let not the Germans who are standing here feel that we are full of hate.... The crimes are too grave for man to understand, to believe that they come from man. What good is vengeance to these nameless ones?" In a rare interpolation as an historian, Manuel adds, "bodies of Jews are rotting everywhere in ... Germania and they should never be forgotten.... In the short time at the disposal of the Boche ... he managed to have six million Jews who were not at war killed, and to reignite in the hearts of the countries of Europe a loathing for the Jews, who were being turned to soap to wash away his bloodstains."

COURTESY STEERFORTH PRESS

Frank Manuel at the ruins of Hitler's Eagle's Nest, May 1945

And yet, in the American march to Leipzig, where he rounded up German scientists before the city had to be handed over to the Russians, Manuel did not encounter any of the horrors of the Holocaust. The Germans had deliberately placed the extermination camps in the east, in Poland; and it was the Red Army that liberated Auschwitz. It is important that here is a memoir from the first hour that does not have the Holocaust at its center or in fact anywhere near the center of experience: this has representative significance.

Manuel catches a whole range of responses from the defeated Germans. Some clung to their faith in Hitler who, they claimed, had merely been ill-served by his paladins. There were many fantasies of exculpation: we were attacked; we had to defend ourselves, especially against the savage Russians; we didn't know about any German atrocities—and so we were innocent, we were betrayed; and we suffered, as they did.

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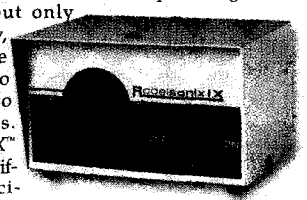

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In a kind of operatic tangle, Lieutenant Manuel, dressed in a uniformed disguise, was ordered to escort or deliver Admiral Horthy, the ex-regent of Hungary, from his Nazi house arrest to American headquarters in Wiesbaden. Was Horthy a wrongly deposed head of state or a war criminal? Manuel conversed with him civilly, asking him why he had collaborated for so long, at the cost of sacrificing so many Hungarian lives at the Eastern front. "*Was konnte ich denn machen?*," he asked. "What could I do? I was the helpless Führer of a little state." Here we can see what the head of a geographically exposed nation in the heart of Central Europe had in common with ordinary Germans: a self-righteous feeling of impotence. Or ignorance.

THIS ISSUE OF complicity and responsibility haunts us still. It was certainly on the minds of the occupying forces of the defeated Germany. They thought that Germans would acknowledge, and might even wallow in, guilt. But that was not their principal concern. They were men, too; in time they broke with General Eisenhower's nonfraternization order, their minds on food and sex and booze. As Manuel records, "occupation is primitive business." And a naïve business, too. This is how he describes American efforts at re-education: "Since you are misguided heathens we are sending you a thousand professors of poetry, journalism, economics, politics, biology and business administration in order to teach you the inner check, to instruct you by example that it's wrong to burn and slaughter six million Jews..."

Some of these vignettes and snapshots of history have a surprising actuality today. The debate over German responsibility is far from over, the past keeps intruding on the German and European present, and the German lament over German suffering, somewhat muted in recent decades, may become louder again. In today's relentless revisionism, the fate of millions of Germans, who were expelled from eastern territories by Czechs, Poles, and Soviets, is also being recalled and re-examined.

Manuel's book is aptly titled. An historian recalls, or tries to re-imagine, unexpected scenes of war; and Manuel has lost none of the talents that he showed as a journalist a half-century ago. He is oddly apologetic for breaking away from the forms of magisterial history, and feels the need to taunt Leopold von Ranke, the Nestor of critical history, for his famous hope that historians might recover "what actually happened." In Manuel's view, this was a "pretentious manifesto." (In the process, Manuel misquotes Ranke and adds to some other minor linguistic inaccuracies in his account.) It has become fashionable to set up Ranke as a strawman of objectivity, the more easily to indulge in present-day subjectivity. But Manuel need have no regret. He has not committed the frequent error of our day, pretending that fiction is enriched history. His own subjectivity is disciplined by knowledge and insight. He lets us see and almost feel "the cloud of unknowing" that once hung over Western Europe at the end of World War II. He has enlivened the reader's historical imagination, and we should be grateful. ■

The Seeded Self

By CALEB CRAIN

Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript by Henry David Thoreau edited and introduced by Bradley P. Dean

(Norton, 409 pp., $29.95)

I.

WILD THINGS ARE hard to package for sale. But in the 1840s, the town of Concord, Massachusetts was home to resourceful thinkers, and the friends and neighbors of Henry David Thoreau thought they knew how to bring him to market. A strategy wasn't far to seek. Everyone knew Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. The Englishman's collection of notes on local wildlife and plants was beloved in nineteenth-century America. It occurred to more than one Transcendentalist: why not have Thoreau knock it off?

In 1842, Emerson had White's book in mind when he gave Thoreau his first grown-up writing assignment: a review for the *Dial* of four new botanical and zoological surveys. Emerson published Thoreau's essay under the *Selborne*-esque title "Natural History of Massachusetts." A few years later, when Hawthorne recommended Thoreau to New York publisher Evert Duyckinck, he had the same marketing instinct. "The only way...," Hawthorne wrote, "in which [Thoreau] could ever approach the popular mind, would be by writing a book of simple observation of nature, somewhat in the vein of White's *History of Selborne*." It was sensible advice.

It might even have turned out to be profitable, but Thoreau never quite got around to taking it. As he once wrote in his journal, "My practicalness is not to be trusted to the last." The *Dial* essay that inaugurated his career was as close as he got. Although Thoreau admired *Selborne*, the two books he saw into print—*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in 1849, and *Walden* in 1854—were much more ambitious and peculiar. His protest writing broke away from White's quaint model altogether.

Yet the model stuck in his mind. At the end of his life, some of Thoreau's anti-market prickliness seems to have relented. The essays that would eventually become chapters in *The Maine Woods* and *Cape Cod* were conventional travelogues, more or less (except for a few pantheistic outbursts, which magazine editors stumbled over). In 1859 or 1860, Thoreau turned at last to a *Selborne*-like project, on a grand scale. He re-read his journal and indexed nearly a decade of his daily observations in calendrical lists—over 750 pages of them—tracking by month and day the annual appearance of leaves, flowers, birds, fruits, and animals in Concord. It is impossible today to know what Thoreau planned to do with the lists, but they seem to have provided him with the scaffolding for at least two book-length manuscripts of botanical observation, "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds." Thoreau struggled through several drafts of "Fruits" and "Seeds," but he never finished either.

His death in 1862 released a flood of posthumous publication, but it was not a case of morbid opportunism by his publishers—not at first, anyway. Knowing

CALEB CRAIN is a senior editor at *Lingua Franca*. His book, *American Sympathy: Friendship in Early U.S. Literature*, will be published by Yale next year.

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that his death was near, Thoreau had arranged for most of the publications himself. In James T. Fields, of the *Atlantic Monthly* and the Boston publishing house Ticknor & Fields he had at last found an editor who appreciated and deferred to him. Not only did Fields agree to retain Thoreau's deviations from orthodox Christianity, he even relieved Thoreau of the infamous library that he had written himself: the seven hundred unsold copies of *A Week* that had sat in Thoreau's attic since that book's commercial débacle.

Except for an essay that Thoreau himself had carved out, Fields left "Fruits" and "Seeds" in manuscript. So did the Houghton, Mifflin Company in its twenty-volume Thoreau edition in 1906. Over the last century, Thoreauvians have paid the two texts the wistful compliments that accrue to fruits beyond the reach of harvesters. In 1965, Thoreau's biographer Walter Harding asserted that the manuscripts contain "some of [Thoreau's] best writing," and added that "someday, it is to be hoped, [they] will be edited and published." The responsible, meticulous editors of the Princeton University Press *Writings* have promised to publish them, but Princeton launched its edition in 1971 and to date has got no further than volume five of Thoreau's fourteen-volume journal. It could be decades before Princeton gets to "Fruits" and "Seeds."

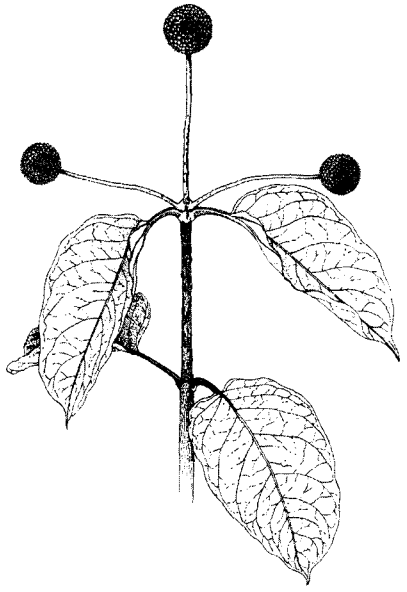
Into this breach has jumped Bradley P. Dean. In 1993, the small Island Press published Dean's edition of "The Dispersion of Seeds" under the pious-sounding but Thoreau-derived title *Faith in a Seed*. As Dean himself later wrote, the "commercial success" of that volume "changed everything." Money often does. Now a much larger publisher has released Dean's version of *Wild Fruits* in a deluxe edition, with dozens of illustrations, color maps on the endpapers, and gold and green leaf on the spine.

The literary marketplace attracted Thoreau even as it appalled him. But it certainly did appall him. "If you would get money as a writer or lecturer," Thoreau wrote in "Life without Principle," "you must be popular, which is to go down perpendicularly." One hundred and thirty-seven years after his death, these uncapitalistic scruples have been swept aside, and Thoreau has at last published a nature book in a safely inoffensive style.

II.

In an irony that Thoreau would relish, for half the price of Dean's *Wild Fruits* you can buy the best of it in Thoreau's *Natural History Essays*, edited by Robert Sattelmeyer. It is not deluxe; in fact, it is all but out of print. Still, *Natural History Essays* is one reason that scholars have resisted printing "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds." There is a considerable overlap between those two unfinished manuscripts and this collection of essays and lectures, where Thoreau's intentions are much better known.

The best way to describe the overlap is to track Thoreau's literary moves in his last few years. In the winter of 1859-60, probably while compiling his calendrical charts, Thoreau wrote the lecture "Wild Apples." This was the winter when Thoreau told Concord that at Harpers Ferry, John Brown had given "many a man who was lately contemplating suicide . . . something to live for!" Clashes over the Fugitive Slave Law had raised Thoreau's temperature. In the lectern, his "I's" and "you's" were as sharp as knives. In its subject



Button Bush

matter "Wild Apples" was milder and sweeter than his anti-slavery lectures, but its style was just as personal and direct.

We do not know whether "Wild Apples" came before "Wild Fruits" or after it. The lecture's success may have inspired Thoreau to elaborate it into a longer work, or maybe Thoreau discovered while writing "Wild Fruits" that a lecture on apples ripened and dropped from it naturally. Unfortunately, "Wild Fruits" as a whole did not ripen. Many writers will recognize the problem from a similar, sad experience of their own: the idea for the book was beautiful, but with the kind of regular, mathematical beauty that turns out to be tedious to execute. Thoreau aimed to describe every fruit in Concord, in the order in which it ripened. That would have resulted in a modest, somewhat fussy book, if Thoreau had been content to do no more than to itemize and to describe. He wasn't, to judge by what he achieved in "Wild Apples."

"Wild Apples" was modest only apparently. By means of unassuming notes on apples, Thoreau presented nothing less than his lover's quarrel with civilization. "*Our* wild apple is wild only like myself, perchance," he wrote, "who belong not to the aboriginal race here, but have strayed into the woods from the cultivated stock." Thoreau appreciated the distinctive smacks and tangs of different apples, but he sampled their distinctions in order to reach a more generalized problem: the ideal meaning of fruit, as nature's reluctant tithe to culture.

> I frequently pluck wild apples of so rich and spicy a flavor that I wonder all orchardists do not get a scion from that tree, and I fail not to bring home my pockets full. But perchance, when I take one out of my desk and taste it in my chamber, I find it unexpectedly crude—sour enough to set a squirrel's teeth on edge and make a jay scream.

It was a brilliant strategy for a lecture, but difficult to repeat. Not even Thoreau had in him as many different essay-length ideas about the meaning of fruit as there were kinds of fruit in Concord. There is some very good writing in "Wild Fruits," but for pages and pages Thoreau did no more than collate his notes. The liveliest passages described the fruits that he could eat: strawberry, blueberry, cranberry, huckleberry, watermelon, and apple. If he could not find a Transcendental meaning for an edible, he could at least be juicily anecdotal.

Was "Wild Fruits" dragged down by its own schematic heaviness, or was it pushed? In early 1860, Thoreau read Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, just months after it was published. Darwin discussed the geographic distribution of seeds by "accidental means," such as sea-water and birds. Soon afterward, Thoreau began to think less about fruits as things-in-themselves and more about seeds. An almost offhand comment by Darwin—"everyone has heard that when an American forest is cut down, a very different vegetation springs up"—seems to have suggested to Thoreau that his minute observations of tree propagation in Concord had a place in a wider scientific debate.

Estimates of Darwin's impact on Thoreau have risen sharply over the last few decades. In 1965, Walter Harding judged that Thoreau read Darwin "too late to have any significant influence on his own thinking"; but in 1993 Robert D. Richardson claimed Thoreau "as a major ally

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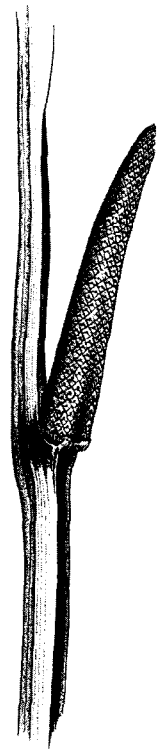

Sweet Flag

of Charles Darwin." Richardson overstates the case. As a scientist, Thoreau reflected Darwin's fire very palely. You would never know from reading Thoreau that putting nature into words was a scientific problem as well as an aesthetic problem—that living things never fit into the neat categories known as species, and that this difficulty with names revealed something crucial.

Thoreau was never precise enough about naming organisms to notice their resistance to his practice. His interest was Romantic. "Modern botanical descriptions approach ever nearer to the dryness of an algebraic formula, as if x + y were = to a love-letter," he regretted in his journal. "How much better to describe your object in fresh English words rather than in these conventional Latinisms." Darwin does seem to have crystallized Thoreau's many observations about seeds; but there is no equivalent in Thoreau to Darwin's patient experiments on the subject, such as when Darwin cleared six square feet of soil, and "marked all the seedlings of our native weeds as they came up, and out of the 357 no less than 295 were destroyed, chiefly by slugs and insects." Thoreau was a saunterer, not a counter.

The climax of Thoreau's Darwinian phase came in September 1860, when Thoreau delivered "The Succession of Forest Trees" to the Middlesex Agricultural Society. Whereas "Wild Apples" had disguised its philosophy as quaint natural history, "Succession" masqueraded as civic-minded science. "Every man is entitled to come to Cattle-Show," Thoreau began, "even a transcendentalist." His scientific point was relatively modest. Like Darwin, Thoreau cited the well-known observation that in America "when a pine wood was cut down an oak one common sprang up, and *vice versa*." Thoreau asserted that this happened because forests were continually planted with the seeds of rival trees, spread by wind, squirrels, and birds.

> If you look through the thickest pine wood, even the seemingly unmixed pitch pine ones, you will commonly detect many little oaks, birches, and other hard woods, sprung from seeds carried into the thicket by squirrels and other animals, and also blown thither, but which are overshadowed and choked by pines.

The lecture's Transcendental content was suggested even more elliptically than that of "Wild Apples," but it was not absent.

"The Succession of Forest Trees" was a hit. Horace Greeley printed it in the *New York Weekly Tribune*, and it was reprinted so often that according to Harding it "achieved the widest circulation of any of Thoreau's shorter essays in his lifetime." As with "Wild Apples," the success seems to have led Thoreau to hope he could turn the lecture into a book. In 1861, he worked to lengthen "The Succession of Forest Trees" into a longer manuscript. Like the earlier "Wild Fruits," "The Dispersion of Seeds" attempted a quasi-encyclopedic survey of Concord's flora. Thoreau recycled many passages from "Fruits" in "Seeds," usually sharpening the prose. But the method of lengthening was different. Thoreau had expanded "Wild Apples" into "Wild Fruits" the way you add to a string of beads: by repetition. He expanded "The Succession of Forest Trees" into "The Dispersion of Seeds" the way you add to a snowball: by layering. He inserted observations and quotations for which he had had no room in his lecture. The result was larger and slower, but roughly the same shape.

In 1862, with his death in sight, Thoreau took "Wild Apples" out of "Wild Fruits." He wrote a new introduction and conclusion, and gave it to Fields for the *Atlantic Monthly*. He began to extract a second essay from "Wild Fruits," about huckleberries, but he didn't live to finish his edition. In 1970, Leo Stoller published this unfinished draft under the title "Huckleberries." Until Bradley P. Dean's efforts at recovery, "Wild Apples," "The Succession of Forest Trees," and "Huckleberries" were the only parts of "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds" in print. As the chronology above suggests, there is some reason to believe that was how Thoreau wanted it. It is tempting to speculate what Thoreau might have done with the manuscripts if he had had a few more years to work on them. But it is risky to second-guess the publishing decisions that Thoreau himself made.

THAT SAID, THE editors at Island Press were luckier than the editors at Norton. Of the two manuscripts that Dean has edited, "The Dispersion of Seeds" has the better claim to being printed. Its prose is more consistently polished. The evidence is strong that Thoreau abandoned "Wild Fruits" even before illness forced him to abandon it: in addition to removing "Wild Apples" and "Huckleberries" from it, he recycled a number of passages from "Wild Fruits" in "The Dispersion of Seeds." To be specific, he recycled descriptions of the *Ascelpias cornuti*, birch, dandelion, *Desmodium*, elderberry, hazel, *Hieracium*, hound's tongue, lily, maple, mouse-ear, oak, peltandra, pitch pine, pumpkin, shrub oak, thistle, touch-me-not, white pine, and witch hazel. Still, as Emerson once joked, there is a kind of scholar who believes that "to know the tree you should ... eat all the apples." Fervent Thoreauvians will want to be able to read "Wild Fruits," and they will be glad that Dean has given it to them.

BUT NOBODY ELSE should bother—which makes it odd that Dean's is not a scholarly edition, even though it looks like a scholarly edition, and is impastoed with footnotes. In his introduction, Dean claims that "I have edited the manuscript as [Thoreau] left it, making no effort whatever to complete what he began." In a recent letter in the *New York Times Book Review*, Dean protested that his book "does not add a word beyond what Thoreau himself wrote, nor does it organize his thoughts in any way beyond what he intended." But Dean's own footnotes belie him.

The thorniest question facing Dean was how to present Thoreau's editorial instructions to himself. In many places in "Wild Fruits," Thoreau wrote no more than a reference, usually to his journals: "*Vide* October 31," or "See July 3, 1860, still green; and see January 10, 1855, and June 13, 1858, going to seed?" Had he finished "Wild Fruits," Thoreau would have replaced these references with polished prose developed from the texts to which he referred himself. Should an editor print the instructions or follow them?

A scholarly editor would print the instructions as they appear in the manuscript; and if the text to which Thoreau referred were not readily available, a scholarly editor might append it as a footnote. An interventionist editor, by contrast, would insert the cited text directly into the body of the book and relegate Thoreau's instructions to a footnote. Maddeningly, Dean does a little of both, and he does that inconsistently. Sometimes he inserts into the body of "Wild Fruits" the text that Thoreau's instructions point to. Sometimes he prints in a footnote both Thoreau's instructions and the text that they cite. Sometimes he moves Thoreau's instructions to a footnote without printing the text that they cite. The one thing that Dean never does is print Thoreau's

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instructions in the body of the text, where Thoreau left them. That would make *Wild Fruits* look raw and fragmentary.

This inconsistent editorial policy gives Dean an alarming amount of latitude. Consider the turnips. Immediately after a description of wild holly dated July 14, Thoreau wrote, "*Vide* scrap → Turnips." Dean enlarges this cryptic instruction into a paragraph. He finds what he believes to be the scrap of paper in question, which reads, "Pulling turnips 329." This, he determines, refers to a paragraph about turnips on page 329 of volume Thirty-Two of Thoreau's manuscript journal. Dean prints this paragraph in the body of *Wild Fruits*. In a footnote, he records his paper trail.

But all is not well. As Dean explains, he has dated the entry on turnips himself: "I add the date here, July fifteenth, on authority of the dating scheme of the other sections in which Thoreau entered nothing more than the name of the plant and the date." This sounds very proper. The date has to be July 15, after all, because "Wild Fruits" is organized in fairly strict chronological order, and the date for the wild holly is July 14. But the result reads rather oddly. Dean has Thoreau writing, "Raw turnips. July fifteenth./ Another finger-cold evening . . ." A few sentences later, Thoreau refers to "pulling turnips when the first cold weather numbs your fingers." It doesn't sound like the middle of July.

It isn't, but Dean has made this unnecessarily hard to figure out. Perhaps to thicken the patina of scholarship, he claims to have transcribed the turnip paragraph directly from Thoreau's manuscript journal. Unhelpfully, however, he does not give the corresponding volume and page numbers of the Houghton, Mifflin edition of the journal, available in most libraries. If you consult William L. Howarth's census of Thoreau's literary manuscripts, you can figure them out for yourself. As it turns out, this particular paragraph appears on page 256 of volume Fourteen—and Thoreau wrote it on November 21, 1860, a much more plausible date for a finger-cold evening.

Did Thoreau mean to insert a different journal entry at this point in "Wild Fruits"? He may have been thinking of July 14, 1851, when he found some county commissioners eating raw turnips and tried one himself. More likely, he meant to look over the entries from *both* dates when he returned to compose his description of turnips. But by choice or by fate, he never did return to compose it. I do not mean to reproach Dean for failing to read Thoreau's mind adequately; he had no business trying to read Thoreau's mind at all.

The turnips that Dean has cooked up are relatively mild. Much worse are his European cranberries, a six-page gallimaufry of Thoreau quotations "based solely on my judgment," as Dean's footnotes repeatedly concede. And there are other idiosyncrasies. On page 202, for example, Dean emends "Sophia" to "my sister," and explains in a footnote that he made the change "to conform with Thoreau's practice of not using proper names of individuals in his published writings." But this scruple was not with Dean on page 140, when he allowed Sophia to go a-barberrying under her own name. On the other hand, with odd formality Dean expands the abbreviation "R.W.E." to "Ralph Waldo Emerson," though Thoreau almost never spelled out Emerson's first name, because Emerson rarely used it. Dean's treatment of Thoreau's "use marks"—vertical slashes through text to remind Thoreau when he had harvested a passage for reuse elsewhere—also varies considerably.

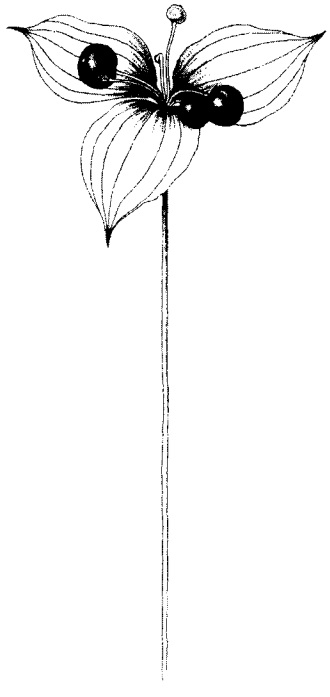
Some of these are small distortions, and it is clear that Dean means well. But they add up to a larger distortion, and meaning well only aggravates the problem. Thoreau famously disavowed good intentions. "If I repent of any thing," he wrote in *Walden*, "it is very likely to be my good behavior." Yet the Thoreau whom Dean finds in *Wild Fruits* is self-effacing and innocuous. Here is the lesson that Dean draws from the book: "If we can realize that we are mysteriously related to matter, we will act to preserve the world because human beings protect what we love or feel related to." Could Thoreau really have intended a message so nice? To lose interest in a project is a kind of decision. By presenting as Thoreau's a work that failed to hold his attention, Dean alters our image of Thoreau. Worse, he tames it. Thoreau knew that the American public liked to read pieties and scenic descriptions, but that is not why he went to the woods.

III.

No second act followed *Walden*, and ever since Emerson scholars of Thoreau have wondered why. Until recently, since almost no one had read "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds," they were available to represent what Thoreau might have been: the "broken task" that Emerson had famously described in his funeral elegy for Thoreau. Now that the two manuscripts can be seen more or less for what they are, this debate will have to shift its ground, but it is unlikely to dissipate.

Something happened to Thoreau around 1850 or 1851, in the midst of revising *Walden*. His views of nature and of literary work changed, and his journal metamorphosed from "an all-purpose literary storehouse" into something akin to "a biologist's field notebook," as Leo Marx recently observed. Was this change a good or a bad thing? Perry Miller, one of the most famous scholars of Transcendentalism, judged it a narcissistic retreat and a literary tragedy. More charitable critics, including Leo Marx and Alfred Kazin, have argued that although the change in Thoreau may have been regrettable, the transformed journal ought to be considered an aesthetic achievement in its own right.

The environmentalist critic Lawrence Buell has a third opinion. He applauds Thoreau's turn away from society and toward nature. Buell is not disturbed that the late Thoreau no longer sparred with culture. Quite the contrary. In Buell's opinion, *Walden* did not leave humanity far enough behind: it still had Thoreau in it. "In order to focus as intensively as he later did on natural history as a literary subject," Buell writes, "Thoreau had to overcome an intense preoccupation with himself, his moods, his identity, his vocation, his relation with other people." In this view, *Walden* was an important transitional step in Thoreau's development away from anthropocentrism. The increasingly ascetic, increasingly scientific journal continued that development, but the arc remained incomplete at his death. "As I see it," Buell writes, "the later Thoreau had a more coherent sense of intellectual and literary purpose, though he died before he could achieve a syn-



Medeola

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thesis elegant enough to please him." Presumably "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds" were rough drafts of this synthesis.

This is a startling revision of what an older generation of scholars valued about Thoreau. In 1964, for example, Leo Marx argued that *Walden*'s richest meanings were social and humane. In his account, the book was a pastoral, with an American twist. Thoreau was playing the literary game of withdrawal from the world as if it could be lived rather than merely gestured at: "Instead of writing about it—or *merely* writing about it—he tries it." But this earnestness was itself a further move in the game; and the humor and the power of *Walden* derived from Thoreau's willingness to act the part of the straight man. Buell differs so sharply from Marx's view that he caricatures it: he accuses Marx of believing "Thoreau was not really *that* interested in nature as such; nature was a screen for something else." Thoreau's gradual abandonment of his own meanings for nature's is, in Buell's opinion, his chief merit. He is confident that "the development of Thoreau's thinking about nature . . . move[s] along a path from homocentrism toward biocentrism."

THE PROBLEM WITH Buell's hypothesis is that it depends on a masterpiece that does not exist. Neither "Wild Fruits" nor "The Dispersion of Seeds" need to have been this masterpiece, which can be postponed indefinitely, further and further into the future that Thoreau did not have. Still, it is possible to pause and examine "Fruits" and "Seeds" for what they are. And it is prudent to do so, because what they are suggests sharp limits to what they could have become.

Red Oak Acorns

In each text, there is an attempt at objectivity, and a wish to omit the "I" that *Walden* insolently retained. But the wish fails. When Thoreau does manage to omit himself, the result is leaden. Here are some elderberries, biocentrically observed:

> On the twenty-second of August I have seen the elderberry bushes weighed down with fruit partially turned and *still in bloom* at the extremities of their twigs. The great black cymes begin to be conspicuous, weighing down the bushes along fences near the end of August. The clusters swell and become heavy and therefore droop, bending the bushes down, just in proportion as they ripen. Hence, you see the green cymes perfectly erect, the half ripe more or less drooping, and the perfectly ripe commonly hanging straight down on the same bush. The terminal cyme, when it chances to be held erect, is of a very regular form: four principal divisions drooping toward each quarter around an upright central one, as the lower cymes droop around the upper one.

As Thoreau himself once noted, "Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness."

More often, though, Thoreau cheats on his aspiration to objectivity, and smuggles himself back in. In his day, science was beginning to professionalize, and he knew himself to be an amateur. When the American Association for the Advancement of Science invited him to join in 1853, Thoreau confided to his journal that the proposal bordered on ridiculous, because "the fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot." In the "Huckleberries" essay extracted from "Wild Fruit," he opined that a strictly objective treatise on huckleberries would be "worthless," because it would have "none of the spirit of the huckleberry in it." Some scientist. Darwin, in *On the Origin of Species*, discusses pigeons and barnacles at length, but his book has none of their spirit, and most readers do not lament the lack.

Thoreau once told Emerson that "to detach the description from its connections in my mind would make it no longer true or valuable to me." Although Dean's loose editing blurs the difference between the would-be objectivity of "Wild Fruits" and the highly personal tone of the journals, a modern reader who spends time with both "Fruits" and the journal will confirm Thoreau's insight: where his detached descriptions are not miserably dull, it is because they are still attached to his subjectivity after all.

Like wild fruits themselves, Thoreau's descriptions of nature are best enjoyed in the field where they grew, his journal. Plucked and packaged as science, they are staler. In "Wild Fruits," it is intriguing when Thoreau describes some poison dogwood berries as "yellowish and greenish-white, ovoid, pearly or waxen on its few coarse branches—beautiful as Satan." In the journal entry where it originally appears, however, this simile is richly tangled with other concerns. It follows a passage regretting that Thoreau has "seemingly preferred hate to love" with his friends. "There is no precept in the New Testament that will assist me," Thoreau writes. "My nature, it may be, is secret. . . . I am under an awful necessity to be what I am." The journal entry hints that in Thoreau's nature, as in nature proper, what attracted attention and interest could prove toxic.

IV.

IT WOULD BE wrong to obscure this darkness. It sometimes seems as if Thoreau turned to nature as a way of continuing to enjoy a self that he felt forbidden to experience directly. In the natural world, he could find both purity and sensuousness, and these conflicting desires—for self-abnegation, for unconventional pleasures—are very far from an altruistic interest in nature for nature's sake. To call Thoreau non-anthropocentric is, for this reason, to choose sides in Thoreau's interior battle: to champion purity over self-indulgence.

In 1993, the Thoreau biographer Robert D. Richardson welcomed Dean's edition of "The Dispersion of Seeds" with a particular kind of relief: at last "the bachelor of thought and nature," as Emerson called him, had a few nice things to say about reproduction. After all, for a celebration of life in the woods, *Walden* is peculiar in its near total silence about the birds and the bees. A few copulating squirrels provide the only moment of sexual tension, and Thoreau tries vigorously to stop them. Richardson had apparently been waiting for the other shoe to drop, and in "Seeds" he thought he heard it. "*Walden* is about the growth and cultivation of the self," Richardson wrote; "*The Dispersion of Seeds* is about the growth of communities and the rise of new generations." Richardson noted that whereas *Walden*'s first chapter praises "the cypress, which bears no fruit," as the only tree that is truly free, *The Dispersion of Seeds* opens with Pliny's observation that seedless trees "are regarded as sinister." In *Dispersion*, Thoreau vows to show that *all* trees bear seeds, despite "a lingering doubt in many minds."

What "lingering doubt" is Thoreau addressing? In 1991, a quarter of a century after publishing his biography of Thoreau, Walter Harding added an important postscript to his analysis of his subject: an essay in the *Journal of Homosexuality* arguing that Thoreau had "a specific sexual interest in members of his own sex." This aspect of Thoreau's sensibility has remained strangely quarantined

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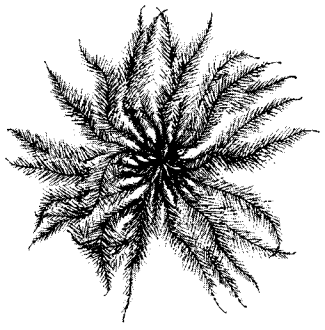
from mainstream Thoreau scholarship, despite Harding and gay scholars such as Henry Abelove, Jonathan Ned Katz, and Michael Warner. Richardson has consistently downplayed it. (So allergic is Richardson to all things Freudian that he took the precaution of omitting Thoreau's childhood and adolescence from his biography.)

Of course, Thoreau could not have thought of himself as a homosexual as we understand the term, but he did think of himself as chaste and childless. A careful reader of Darwin and a close observer of nature, he wondered what it meant that he dispersed no seed of his own. (He half-asserted, half-speculated in his journal that "The end of marriage is not the propagation of the species—If you & I succeed there will have been men enough—any more than the object of the blossom is to mature the seed.") He also knew that in his relationships with men, his emotions were often more turbulent and demanding than his partners.' "Methinks that I carry into friendship the tenderness & nicety of a lover," he admitted in his diary.



Clematis

"The Dispersion of Seeds" and "The Succession of Forest Trees" do celebrate reproduction, but not quite as sunnily as Richardson believes. Thoreau celebrates reproduction by death, devouring, excretion, accident, and inattention. He shows life propagating itself in ways that are neither magical nor obvious. A squirrel buries a nut, and if the squirrel dies, a hickory tree is born. With a cherry, nature bribes "wild men and children" to swallow cherrystones and thus transport them to fallow ground. Though you may not notice it, oak seedlings have already sprouted among your pines, and pine seedlings among your oaks.

There is no more sex in "The Dispersion of Seeds" than in *Walden*. When Thoreau describes male and female willows, he refers to them as "sterile" and "fertile." Generation in nature, as Thoreau describes it, is a paradox. Pine seeds may come from pine trees, but pine trees kill the pine seedlings under their skirts. "Few oaks spring up under an oak wood," Thoreau observes. There is a pun in the title of Thoreau's lecture: by the "succession" of forest trees, he means, strictly speaking, their reproductive failure. Oaks do not succeed to oaks; pines do. It is bad luck for a pinecone—or an apple or an acorn or a writer—not to fall far from the tree that bore it.

As with "Wild Apples," then, Thoreau was continuing his autobiography by other means. It was his fate as a writer, after all, to be seeded by Emerson's genius, and then stunted by his shadow. Failed roots fascinate Thoreau. He digs up roots of hickory, oak, and walnut and counts the rings on each aborted stub—the evidence of years and years of attempts to shoot up into trees, thwarted by frost, fire, rabbits, cows, and men. Scarred, gnarled, and yet still willing to burgeon, the roots speak to Thoreau of his own case. Anyone with a rosy view of the life of intellectuals, he recommends with a snarl, should "go and dig up a dozen seedling oaks and hickories, read their biographies, and see what they here contend with."

This is not quite the "interest in fecundity" that Richardson describes, but the fecundity of Thoreau's life was not a family sort. As a bachelor in nineteenth-century New England, Thoreau was expected to help care for the sick, the dying, and the dead. It was no accident that when Margaret Fuller drowned, Thoreau was deputized to search for her body and any of her manuscripts that may have washed ashore. Nor was it an accident that the sight of the drowned shook him deeply, and should probably be counted among the things that happened to Thoreau in 1850 to change his writing so irrevocably. He was the Transcendentalist assigned to look at death. He saw it differently than the others. Only Thoreau would have praised John Brown and his fellow conspirators by calling them "the very best men you could select to be hung."

In his journal in 1850, Thoreau described "a shrike pecking to pieces a small bird." After recording the details of the image, he noted that "I find that I had not associated such actions with my idea of birds. It was not bird-like." It was certainly not a pretty picture of nature; it would have been difficult to sell. Yet Thoreau detected a kind of strength in the cruelty. Nature could be liberal with life only because it was liberal with death. It stints on neither. That was a fact of its wildness, which Thoreau loved. "It is not the part of a true culture to tame tigers," he once wrote, "any more than it is to make sheep ferocious." Not to look at death would rob life of its edge—which is why we should want to distinguish what Thoreau wrote from what he died without finishing. ■

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KABUL DIARIST

Going Soft

IT WAS RAMADAN IN AFGHANISTAN. By comparison, Savonarola's Florence during Lent must have felt like party central. In a country where millions are cold and hungry throughout the winter, the faithful were observing one of the five pillars of Islam: abstaining from food and drink from dawn to dusk during the holy month. No wonder I was the only guest in Kabul's grim, cavernous, and incongruously named Intercontinental Hotel.

VESTIGES OF FORMER ERAS LINGERED in the lobby—signs for the ballroom, directions to the bar, advertisements for vacations in the Soviet Union. Today, such indulgences seem a world away. Since capturing Kabul, the capital, in 1996, the band of religious students called the Taliban has imposed its purist vision of Islam on most of Afghanistan, banning chess, cards, nonreligious music, television, jobs for women, and education for girls. In a Monty Pythonesque touch, the government even outlawed paper bags, on the theory that they might contain fragments of recycled Korans. In Kabul, women scurry by in ragged *burqas*—the bulky body veils with which they are required to cover themselves, leaving only a small grille over their eyes through which to see. Men wear their beards long; the punishment for shaving is two days in prison. Curfew starts at nine. By eight the streets are deserted, except for young soldiers at every traffic circle who carefully inspect passing vehicles. Some wear black kohl eyeliner, which gives them a look that is at once feline and fierce.

AND YET THE TALIBAN IS NOW EDGING toward its own brand of "liberalism." Slowly and quietly, the government is loosening up. Of course, one should not exaggerate the magnitude of the shift. For one thing, it is happening informally. And, by any normal standards, the Taliban remains a harsh and unforgiving lot—particularly in areas the group does not fully control. Nonetheless, the Taliban's attitude on everything from women to the role of religion in daily life is changing in significant ways.

WHEN I VISITED AFGHANISTAN IN 1997, soon after the Taliban took power, heavily armed police from the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice roamed the major cities in pickup trucks, enforcing the new religious laws. In Jalalabad I witnessed one crew beat a man who dared to keep riding his bicycle during afternoon prayer hour instead of stopping dead with the other vehicles. But, during this more recent visit, prayer time came and Kabul's traffic didn't even slow down. I saw many women, albeit swathed in *burqas*, walk the streets unescorted, despite the law prohibiting them from leaving home unaccompanied by a male relative. Across Afghanistan, children played soccer and flew kites—activities that were among the Taliban's earliest prohibitions. Even some members of the Taliban have become scofflaws. During a bumpy 17-hour car trip from Kabul to Kandahar, one of my fellow passengers produced a tape of Hindi songs. Such nonreligious music is strictly banned. But our driver, a genial, black-turbaned mullah named Abdul who was an early recruit to the Taliban cause, not only popped the Hindi tape into his player but began to sing along.

THE REASON FOR ABDUL'S BRAZENness became evident as I toured the dank and dreary Pol e Charki prison just outside Kabul. Despite the punishments prescribed for violations of the vice and virtue laws, only 15 of the 1,800 prisoners were in jail for religious offenses. That's not to say the Taliban suddenly tolerates opposing views: the majority of the remaining inmates were political prisoners or soldiers captured during the ongoing civil war in the north. But it's partly because the government is fighting a real war that its culture war has been forced to the back burner.

INDEED, MUCH OF THE TALIBAN'S *softening is the product of mundane* necessity. The regime officially prohibits filming or photographing "living objects," and, in the past, journalists caught secretly filming were summarily expelled. But, during my most recent stay, when hijackers forced an Indian Airlines jet to land at the Kandahar airport, the regime's need to communicate with the watching world made such rules impractical. So the rules were thrown out the window. As the crisis unfolded, officials held daily, televised briefings for both male and female journalists. And photographers and camera crews were allowed to shoot at will.

LIKEWISE, THE REGIME HAS RECOGnized the impracticality, and the danger, of its policy on the medical treatment of women. Until recently, the Taliban's position was, in short, insane: male doctors couldn't treat women, and female doctors couldn't practice medicine. But a group of doctors and anesthetists I ran into at the Kandahar airport told me they are now allowed to see female patients "as long as the woman does not object." In addition, small numbers of female nurses and doctors have been permitted to work in city hospitals. Last May, local authorities in the western city of Herat gave the World Food Program (WFP) permission to run a three-year medical-education program for more than 100 women.

AND THERE ARE NOW MODEST OPPORtunities for women to work more generally as well. Over the past two years the WFP has opened 49 bakeries in Kabul and in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif—bakeries run entirely by Afghan women, mostly widows, who would otherwise be destitute, according to WFP spokesman Khaled Mansour. Similarly, notwithstanding the Taliban's initial outlawing of the education of girls, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, one of the largest NGOs in the country, reports that at the 600 schools it supports, there are now 30,000 female students. Even more astonishingly, a report by the committee states that "there are parts of rural areas in Afghanistan today where there are more girls in schools than ever before in Afghan history."

LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN HAS HARDLY turned into a picnic. The population remains desperately poor—a pharmacist earns about $6 a month. Most families have a hard time feeding their children, let alone scraping together the 25-cent monthly fee charged by some private schools. Instead, many children attend free religious schools, which offer little beyond Koranic instruction. As for the Taliban, *while it has loosened up in some ways, it* remains as brutal as ever in others—particularly in northern Afghanistan, where it continues to battle an alliance led by the nation's former rulers. According to a recent State Department report, the Taliban has committed "numerous serious human rights abuses" over the course of that struggle, including summarily executing civilians, forcibly relocating populations, burning homes and crops, and using forced labor. As I said, in the Taliban's Afghanistan, liberalism is relative.

PETER BERGEN

PETER BERGEN, a broadcast and print journalist based in Washington, D.C., is writing a book about jihad movements.

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